QUOTIDIAN BOUNDARIES AND HOW TO CIRCUMVENT THEM:

AN INQUIRY INTO A SYRIAN COMMUNITY IN ISTANBUL

by
AYŞE ŞANLI

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ateş Ali Altınordu .....

(Thesis Supervisor)

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ayşe Parla .....

Doç. Dr. Didem Danış .....

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: displacement, boundaries, Syrians, community centers, Turkey

The 2011 Syrian Revolution quickly evolved into a state of civil war, which resulted in mass migration primarily to the neighboring countries. The official number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey has recently exceeded three and a half million, with more than 560.000 temporarily protected Syrians registered in Istanbul, the city hosting the largest number of Syrian inhabitants in Turkey. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, combining extensive participant observation and in-depth interviews with adults at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians in Istanbul, this research aims at contributing to the understanding of how quotidian boundaries, far from the physical borders of the nation-states, affect the everyday lives of displaced Syrians living in Istanbul. The research first provides an analysis of the making of legal, social, and symbolic boundaries that affect the relations of Syrians with the Turkish state as well as with ordinary Turkish citizens. It, then, focuses on the forms of organization among the participants of the community center in order to understand the prominent ways in which displaced Syrians could challenge, surpass or circumvent these boundaries. The findings of the fieldwork suggest that the processes of making- and (un)contesting boundaries coincide at this community center on a daily basis: While this community center plays instrumental, socio-psychological, and cultural roles in circumventing the quotidian boundaries, new boundaries emerge at the periphery of the community center, and legal boundaries remain mainly uncontested at a collective level.

ÖZET

GÜNDELİK SINIRLAR NELERDİR, NASIL ATLATILIRLAR:

İSTANBUL'DAKİ SURİYELİ BİR TOPLULUK ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

AYŞE ŞANLI

Kültürel Çalışmalar Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Temmuz 2018

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Anahtar Kelimeler: yerinden edilme, sınırlar, Suriyeliler, toplum merkezleri, Türkiye

2011'de başlayan Suriye Devrimi hızla bir iç savaş halini alırken, özellikle komşu ülkelere kitlesel bir göç olmuştur. Resmi rakamlar Türkiye'de geçici koruma altındaki Suriyeli sayısının üç buçuk milyonu aştığını gösterirken, Türkiye'de en yüksek sayıdaki Suriyeliye ev sahipliği yapan İstanbul'da kayıtlı geçici koruma altındaki Suriyeli sayısı da 560.000'i aşmıştır. Bu araştırma, yerinden edilmiş Suriyeliler tarafından İstanbul'da kurulan yerel bir toplum merkezinde gerçekleştirilmiş, kapsamlı katılımcı gözlem ile yetişkinlerle yapılmış derinlemesine görüşmelerden oluşan bir etnografik saha çalışmasına dayalıdır. Bu araştırma, ulus devletlerin fiziksel sınırlarının ötesinde, gündelik sınırların, İstanbul'da yaşayan yerinden edilmiş Suriyelilerin gündelik hayatlarını nasıl etkilediğini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, öncelikle Suriyelilerin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti devleti ve sıradan Türkiye vatandaşları ile olan ilişkilerini etkileyen hukuki, sosyal ve sembolik sınırların inşasına dair bir inceleme sunmaktadır. Sonrasında, yerinden edilmiş Suriyelilerin bu sınırları hangi şekillerde zorladığını, aştığını ya da atlattığını anlamak amacıyla bu toplum merkezindeki katılımcıların örgütlenme biçimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Saha çalışmasının bulguları, bu toplum merkezinde sınır inşası ve sınırlarla mücadele et(me)me süreçlerinin gündelik bir seviyede kesiştiğini önermektedir: Toplum merkezi, gündelik sınırları atlatmakta pratik, sosyo-psikolojik ve kültürel roller oynarken merkezin çeperinde yeni sınırlar ortaya çıkmakta, hukuki sınırlar ise genellikle kolektif seviyede mücadele edilmemiş bir biçimde kalmaktadır.

To the displaced people of Syria and Palestine

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> As a social phenomenon, migration crosses and blurs the boundaries of societies; as an object of scientific enquiry, it crosses and blurs the boundaries of academic disciplines. (Bauböck 1998:19)

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On a shiny summer day, I rush to Istanbul's Atatürk Airport for seeing Farhad and Ciwan[1] before their departure to Canada for continuing their education. I know that we will be in touch, but I also know that I will not have the chance to hang out with them for a long time. I enter the airport and pass the security check. The airport, as always, is crowded. Farhad and Ciwan came to the airport early in the morning in order to finish their paperwork, since they need to invalidate their temporary protection ID cards before leaving Turkey. I call Ciwan to locate and meet them. Apparently, they hit the wall, as they first need to have their boarding passes for invalidation. We sit together and wait for the opening of the counter for flights to Canada to drop off their luggage and get the boarding passes.

Farhad and Ciwan do not actually need me, since Ciwan speaks Turkish fluently; nevertheless, I continue to stay with them just in case. Expecting to encounter some problems, I feel nervous. This is something that we are accustomed to by now: Syrian passport assures trouble. In the end, we decide to go to the counter a bit earlier before the Airline announces its opening. While dropping off their luggage, their documents—the passports with valid Canada visas and the acceptance letters—are taken for security check. And here we go again: The system rejects printing the boarding passes.

[1] The names of all informants are changed in order to maintain confidentiality.

We go and talk to a few officers at the security-check desk; they take the passports back and make some calls without informing us much, as we wait for more than an hour. I try not to betray how nervous I am for the sake of Farhad and Ciwan. When I approach an officer and ask what is going on, he explains that they need to double-check the visas, thus need another approval from Canada's part to allow Farhad's and Ciwan's departure. I go back to Farhad and Ciwan and explain the situation to them. The anxious waiting ends when the officers solve the problem and return the passports, so that we could get the boarding passes printed.

In the little time left before the flight, we rush to the Visa Breach Office to finish the remaining paperwork. After processing and invalidating their temporary protection ID cards, the road is clear for the customs and the passport check. As they have Syrian passports, Farhad and Ciwan are taken to a separate customs gate. The police officer checks their passports and makes a call to see whether he should let them pass. Once he receives the approval from the other side of the phone, he stamps the passports. As the relief and hurry overweigh the sadness of the farewell, we hastily hug each other. While Farhad and Ciwan pass through another security check before proceeding to the boarding gate, I return home.

On my way back, I ask myself, "How many times did they encounter borders before crossing an 'actual' one?"

1.1. The context of the research

The unrest in Syria that started with anti-regime protests in 2011 quickly evolved into a state of civil war, which has forced many Syrians to leave their hometowns and eventually their country; thus, resulted in a mass migration primarily to the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. As the instability in Syria continues, the hope of return diminishes.

Although being a signatory state to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, Turkey grants refugee status only to those who are

from European states.[2] For non-European asylum seekers, the Turkish state had authorized the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the *UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR*) to deal with the processes of registration, determination of status and third-country resettlement. The number of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey exceeds 365.000—not including people from Syria,[3] the majority of whom are from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia.[4] Due to the arrival on a mass scale, the Turkish state follows an exceptional procedure for Syrians: Syrians, addressed as *guests* (*misafir*) at the outset, were later granted the collective *temporary protection* (*geçiçi koruma*) status.

According to the recent data published by the Turkish authorities, the official number of Syrians registered in Turkey has exceeded three and a half million.[5] Every city in Turkey currently hosts displaced Syrians, nearly 7% of whom living in the state-run camps in the southeastern cities.[6] Meanwhile, Istanbul, the city with the highest population in Turkey, has also become the city hosting the largest number of Syrians under temporary protection with more than 560.000 inhabitants.[7] Hence, Istanbul calls for a closer examination as a city that rapidly becomes 'home' to a significant portion of displaced Syrians.

In his article *Border Struggles in the Migrant Metropolis* (2015a), Nicholas De Genova asserts:

> The spatial practices of migrants and their specifically urban struggles allow us to examine the proliferation of sites of border enforcement far removed from physical borders at the territorial margins of nation-states […] *The migrant metropolis* becomes the premier spatial formation in which we

[2] Turkey's asylum regime and the legal situation of Syrians in Turkey will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter.

[3] UNHCR Türkiye. 2017. "Türkiye'deki Mülteciler ve Sığınmacılar." Retrieved July 20, 2018 (http://www.unhcr.org/tr/turkiyedeki-multeciler-ve-siginmacilar).

[4] Refugee Solidarity Network. 2017. "About Refugees in Turkey." Retrieved July 20, 2018 (https://www.refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/about-refugees-in-turkey/).

[5] T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 2018. "Geçici Koruma." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713).

[6] T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 2018. "Geçici Koruma." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713).

[7] Ibid.

> witness the extension of borders deep into the putative 'interior' of nation-state space… (2015a:3)

Inspired by De Genova's discussion, this research originates from two questions: (1) How can we identify the borders and understand the border struggles that affect everyday lives of displaced Syrians within the city, specifically in Istanbul; and, (2) what are the prominent ways in which displaced Syrians could pass, push, or circumvent these borders?

In a rudimentary sense, the border represents "a process of social division" (Nail 2016:2). This understanding of the border is quickly confounded in a context of nation-states, where citizens and non-citizens hold relative degrees of *privilege* and *desirability* (see Anderson and Hughes 2015; Castles 2005; Danış and Parla 2009; Parla 2011; Sassen 1999). The existing literature offers various types of borders and boundaries, identified at the territorial borders of nation-states as well as at innumerous other sites (see Danış and Soysüren 2014; De Genova 2017; Decimo and Gribaldo 2017; Ganster and Lorey 2005; Michaelsen and Johnson 1997; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2014; Suárez-Navaz 2004; Toplum ve Bilim 2014; Wilson and Donnan 1998). Scholars contribute to the academic literature with the terms "ethnic group boundaries" (Barth 1969/1998); "class boundaries" (Bourdieu 1984); "moral boundaries" (Lamont 1992); different forms of "political boundaries" (Bauböck 1998); "symbolic and social boundaries" (Lamont and Molnár 2002); "mental borders" (Armbruster and Meinhof 2011); "aural borders" (Western 2015). Nicholas De Genova similarly calls for further understandings of borders that are *enmeshed in everyday social relations and practices* (2005:112).

> There does not seem to be any scholarly consensus regarding the differences and similarities among these different designations [the limit, the mark, the boundary, the frontier, and so on]. Even the Oxford English Dictionary muddles the definition of these terms by defining them in almost identical or circular ways that simply reference one another. (Nail 2016:35)

Thomas Nail asserts that "the mark, the limit, the boundary, and the frontier each describe a specific kinetic function of the border." (2016:35) While his attempt to differentiate these terms seems to be philosophically sound, employing Nail's definitions is impractical, since his definitions require an ideal type of border that is present

with all of its components. Acknowledging the existence of innumerous definitions and the lack of consensus, I employ the term *boundary* throughout this thesis for describing the cases where interaction, engagement, or integration is precluded or limited—except for the instances where I refer to the territorial *borders* of nation-states. In a "spatial conjuncture of social relations" (De Genova 2005:112), *boundary-making* includes complex legal, political, economic, social, and cultural processes of inclusion, exclusion, and *inclusive exclusion* (Agamben 1998) that may take overt, *tangible*, or covert, *intangible* forms. I, furthermore, adopt Lamont and Molnár's (2002) definitions of *social* and *symbolic boundaries*, which capture both the tangible and the intangible dimensions of the boundaries that I identify throughout this research:

> *Symbolic boundaries* are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space […] Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership […] *Social boundaries* are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities […] Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways. (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168-169, emphasis added)

Evidently, crossing a border does not automatically mean inclusion, neither does it put an end to people's concerns and struggles; conversely, new fences arise on the horizon (see Soysüren and Danış 2014). Entering the territory of the Turkish state brings about a new set of boundaries for Syrians that may be observed in government offices as well as in more informal places such as neighborhoods and workplaces. The boundaries that I describe in this thesis are thus to be found at innumerable places, between legal statuses, the law and in practice, and in everyday economic and social interactions between displaced Syrians and the Turkish state as well as the Turkish citizens. Finally, boundaries do not have to be enforced or imposed by one side on the other; they might as well be bilaterally constructed.

A preliminary research drew my attention to the spatial concentration of displaced Syrians in certain districts of Istanbul that (re)shapes the forms of organization among themselves. Syrians initiate an increasing number of places, the scope of which is quite extensive from restaurants to bookstores. Nonetheless, community centers draw my special attention: As the idea of civil society comprises taking initiatives at points where

the state falls short of fulfilling some material and nonmaterial needs (see Bernal and Grewal 2014), Syrian-initiated community centers—the number of which are increasing in Turkey—similarly aim at addressing at least some of the challenges that Syrians face in their daily lives in Turkey. In addition to addressing the problems and needs, they also serve as a platform for socialization. Focusing on a local community center initiated by Syrians in Istanbul, this research aims to find out how a Syrian-initiated community center might play a role in passing, pushing, or circumventing the boundaries, or in alleviating the effects of the boundaries in displaced Syrians' everyday lives. This inquiry corresponds to Lamont and Molnár's call for assessing "the permeability and relative importance of different sorts of boundaries" (2002:173), and Bauböck's hint at "the social meaning, the permeability, the spatial location, or the temporal stability" of boundaries (1998:17).

In addition to the two main questions at the outset, this research tries to answer further questions: What is the meaning of coming from Syria in the current Turkish context? What are the legal, economic, and social challenges that displaced Syrians face in Turkey? What kind of boundaries do these challenges constitute in Syrians' everyday lives? How can we identify and understand these boundaries? What are the prominent ways to deal with the encountered problems? In which ways does a Syrian-initiated community center become significant in this web of boundaries? What kind of space does it (re)produce? What is the role of the community center in circumventing the boundaries? Which kinds of boundaries become permeable through the community center? Which kinds of boundaries stay impermeable, and why?

1.2. Methodology

This research adopts ethnographic fieldwork as the main method, based on extensive participant observation and in-depth interviews with adults. The fieldwork was conducted between October 2016 and May 2018 at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians living in Istanbul. It comprises daily interactions with more than 50 people and semi-constructed interviews with 7 people, six male and one female. The interviews were conducted between November 2016 and April 2018, the length of which varies between 50 minutes to three hours. Although the interviews were conducted mainly in English or in Turkish, a mixture of the English, Turkish, and Arabic

languages was prevalent through all the formal interviews as well as the daily interactions.

The community center schedules weekly activities and classes both for children and for adults such as language classes, art workshops, movie nights, and music events. It is located in an apartment building in a vibrant district of Istanbul, and has a small kitchen and two other rooms used as classroom. Although my first encounter with the community center was in May 2016 through the introduction of a friend, it was July 2016 when I started to visit the center regularly by joining the Arabic classes and movie screenings. In October 2016, I asked and obtained the permission to conduct my research at the community center.

1.3. Positionality and ethics

Throughout the research, my relation and attachment to the center—as well as to the people—was not shaped as a hierarchical researcher-subject relationship; rather, I was predominantly perceived as a friend. Most of the time, I was less an observer than a participant. I joined the classes as a student, volunteered as a teacher, brought boardmarkers, helped in cooking, preparing the tea, washing the dishes, and taking the garbage out. The community center has also become a part of my everyday life, as I was there at least three times a week. As I became friends with people throughout my presence, I started to spend time with them outside the community center, too.

This situation, of course, raises several questions regarding my 'distance'—put another way, my 'positionality'—as an anthropologist. Many scholars argue that the researcher should have some distance to her field for the sake of uncontaminated knowledge; yet, other scholars assert that an anthropologist should "go native" in order to produce accurate knowledge (Bernard 2011:262; Gupta and Ferguson 1997:12-17). I do not deny the ethical intricacies attached to this positionality; however, in the case of my research, to be an "insider"[8] in the sense of being perceived as a friend, rather than an inquisitive researcher, was the optimal position for producing knowledge. Although individual

[8] Of course, categories such as "insider" versus "outsider," "us" versus "them" are flimsy. I may, for instance, simultaneously be an "insider" in terms of speaking Arabic, and an "outsider" in terms of being a Turkish citizen.

exceptions exist, this community center explicitly adopts a "no-researcher policy." Salem, the person who established the community center, explains:

> We don't talk with journalists or researchers… At the beginning, we thought that we can—if we do that—we can explain ourselves, explain our issues, explain the difficulties that we face, but actually we didn't feel that it is useful. And some people *use us*. So we said, "Okay, we learn from our mistakes." It is not against anyone but it is, like, easier for us… (Salem)[9]

As some migrants and refugees are willing to give interviews to 'make their voices heard,' some others are fed up with the 'Westerners' who come to 'study' or 'cover' the refugees and then disappear. Yasmin similarly complains about the exchange students who try to gather some information for a class project or a paper while not contributing to the community center at all:

> Those Erasmus students used to come to the Arabic classes, drink up all the tea and coffee, finish the cookies… Once I saw a few of them *cornering* Latefa, trying to interview her… I had to *step in* to take her out! (Yasmin)

While I have several times witnessed the dismissal of researchers and journalists who wanted to conduct interviews at the community center, the responses to my request for conducting interviews were quite positive: "For sure," "no problem, do whatever you want," "I'm happy to help," "I am ready, whenever you want." My initial identity in the field as a part of the community was the ground of these positive responses. Leaving my researcher/graduate student identity to a secondary plane, and establishing relations based on trust and companionship were both essential and natural over the course of the fieldwork.

I tried to make sure that my informants feel comfortable with the formal interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I asked whether my informants would mind if I use a voice recorder. If they allowed me to use it, I recorded the interview. Otherwise, I took notes during and after the interview. I strongly believe that my duty as an anthropologist does not involve producing knowledge through distressing people, whose experiences are beyond one's imagination. Although asking questions about how they ended up in

[9] The transcriptions of the interviews—hence, colloquial expressions and grammar mistakes—are left unedited throughout the thesis.

Istanbul, which inevitably include painful memories, I tried to abstain from asking specific questions that might evoke traumatic events both in my formal interviews and in my daily interactions. Instead, I asked general questions about the trajectory of their lives and about their everyday experiences in Istanbul. Indeed, I received positive reactions regarding this approach: At the end of our interview, Miran noted, "We didn't talk about politics. This was *really* good! It was like a *normal* conversation." Similarly, Siyamend said, "I felt like chatting with a friend and did not even realize the time." Only one of my informants was in an unusual distress on the day of the interview. When I asked him whether I should record the interview, he replied, "Of course, you can." However, he was highly aware of the recorder during the interview and paused it several times. Despite telling me, "Ask me whatever you want," his replies to the questions were evasive. Realizing his discomfort, I took the initiative to stop the voice recorder, and later we agreed upon stopping the interview altogether.

Despite trying to establish an equal relationship with my informants, in some cases a perceived hierarchy was inevitable: For the children, I was always "one of the teachers" mainly due to my age, and for the adults who joined the classes I volunteered, I was primarily "the teacher." In these cases, I abstained from conducting interviews or asking research-related informal questions, although our daily interactions inherently informed this research.

1.4. A few parentheses on terminology

> [S]cholars of migration continue to use "ethnic community" as both the object of study and the unit of analysis in migration research. The new diaspora studies perpetuate the problem by defining the unit of study as people who share an ancestry and a history of dispersal. The ethnic lens used by these scholars shapes—and, in our opinion, obscures—the diversity of migrants' relationships to their place of settlement and to other localities around the world. (Glick Schiller et al. 2006:613)

> The problem only becomes more severe when the inevitable slippage occurs and the migration analyst moves from the use of Hispanic as an identity to *the notion that people having such an identity are part of Hispanic 'community'*. (Kertzer 2017:31, emphasis added)

> Almost like an essentialized anthropological "tribe," refugees become not just a mixed category of people sharing a certain legal status; they become

> "a culture," "an identity," "a social world," or "a community." There is a tendency to proceed as if refugees all shared a common condition or nature. (Malkki 1995:511)

The scholars above elaborately underscore the complexities of defining the unit of analysis in migration and refugee studies based on nationality, ethnicity, or legal status, and the assumptions attached to them. Although they are often treated as a unitary group, which in turn affects their perceptions of self and feelings of belonging, people from Syria do not constitute a homogenous national group in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, or legal status. Each of my informants is a "complex, historical subject, neither a cultural 'type' nor a unique 'individual.'" (Clifford 1992:100) For instance, when I ask how he defines himself in the Turkish context, Miran replies, "I am not Arab; I am Kurd, but still Syrian." Palestinian-Syrians, for example, regardless of the generation, do not hold the Syrian citizenship; they have the refugee status in Syria, but they are collectively treated as "Syrians" in Turkey. The legal status of displaced Syrians' children born in Turkey is another conundrum. Albeit being aware of the drawbacks, I will use the terms "Syrians," "Syrian citizens," and "displaced Syrians" interchangeably throughout the thesis for the reasons of convenience, referring to all these diverse groups of people who arrive in Turkey due to the ongoing war in Syria. The participants of this research attain a 'community' status not by the virtue of sharing a common 'homeland,' or a common legal status, but of participating in the community center as a part of their everyday lives.

The term *migrant (göçmen)* will not be employed for Syrians in Turkey throughout this thesis, as it seems legally inappropriate. The Turkish legal framework applies the term *migrant* only to those "of Turkish descent and culture." (Biner 2014; Danış and Parla 2009; Kadirbeyoğlu 2009; Parla 2011) Additionally, the term *migrant* is generally not employed in cases of forced displacement, as the term has connotations of "economic motivations" and "option."[10] Instead, the terms *refugee (mülteci)* or *forced migration (zorunlu göç)* are widely used (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014). However, I will not use the term *refugee* for Syrians in Turkey, either, as employing this term anticipates a granted, well-defined set of rights. The 1951 Geneva Convention defines the term *refugee* as someone who left one's country of origin or of habitual residence "owing to

[10] Al Jazeera. 2015. "Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean 'migrants.'" Retrieved July 8, 2018 (https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/editors-blog/2015/08/al-jazeera-mediterranean-migrants-150820082226309.html).

well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion;"[11] however, granting the *refugee* status to the *asylum seeker (sığınmacı)* is still at the mercy of nation-states. Despite the fact that Syrians in Turkey are commonly addressed as *Syrian refugees (Suriyeli mülteciler),* they legally cannot hold the refugee status in Turkey in the current legal framework.[12]

This leaves us with the terms *displacement (yerinden edilme)*, or *forced displacement (zorla yerinden edilme)*. These terms are often contested, too, as *displacement* arguably deprives the displaced person of her/his agency, as it denotes the sedentarist premises, and as it is usually employed to denote the internally displaced people *(ülke içinde yerinden edilen insanlar[13])* (Malkki 1992, 1995). Nevertheless, I am going to employ the term *displaced* for Syrians in Turkey throughout this thesis. Academic inquiries should push for alternative ways to challenge the sedentarist assumptions without denying the fact that forced migration is involuntary; thus, people are factually *dis-placed*. The moment of making the decision to leave indeed requires some sort of agency; however, the extent to which agency is effective in the broader picture of forced migration is highly disputable.

1.5. Literature and significance

Thomas Faist (1997, 2000) outlines three main approaches in migration studies: (1) At the macro-level, studies that focus on the political-economic-cultural structures of migration on the level of the nation-states; (2) at the micro-level, studies that focus on migrants' individual experiences and the meaning of the experience; and (3) at the "crucial" meso-level, studies that focus on social relations such as family, household, neighborhood, friendship circles and formal organizations (Faist 1997:195, 2000:30-31). The growing literature on displaced Syrians in Turkey includes macro-level analyses, focusing on statistical data, mapping the immediate and long-term problems, and

[11]UNHCR. 2010. "The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." Retrieved June 30, 2018 (http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10).

[12] Turkey's asylum regime and the legal situation of Syrians in Turkey will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter.

[13] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı. 2014. "Uluslararası İlişkiler Terminolojisi (Türkçe-İngilizce-Fransızca)." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/Terminoloji/uluslararasi-iliskiler-terminolojisi-turkce-ingilizce-fransızca.pdf).

suggesting solutions in terms of policy change, and micro- and meso- level, rather ethnographic analyses, focusing on individual and collective experiences. The tremendous academic and non-academic interest in displaced Syrians in Turkey contributes to the production of knowledge: Academic studies as well as non-academic reports and news articles unanimously highlight the limitation of legal status and rights, and the problems arising from this situation (Biner and Soykan 2016; Dinçer et al. 2013; Erdoğan 2015; İçduygu 2015; Kıvılcım 2015, 2016; Özden 2013; Woods 2016; Woods et al. 2016). Before the Law on Foreigners and International Protection's entry into force in 2014, the Turkish state's employment of the term *guest* was often criticized (Dinçer et al. 2013; Özden 2013). Later works underscore the vagueness of the *temporary protection* status, ongoing problems regarding bureaucracy, education—especially in terms of the emergence of a *lost generation*, and healthcare; the (im)possibility of obtaining work permits, and the exploitation of Syrians in the labor market; and some offer gendered approaches (Biner and Soykan 2016; Danış 2016; Freedman et al. 2017; Kaya and Kıraç 2016; Kıvılcım 2016; Mardin 2017; Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kıvılcım 2015; Terzioğlu 2015; Woods 2016; Woods et al. 2016).

Anthropologists have then and now warned us about the hazards of taking ethnic, cultural, or national categories for granted, as if these categories are exclusive, homogenous, and ahistorical (Clifford 1992; Kertzer 2017; Malkki 1992). Criticizing the *cultural essentialism* that assumes culture as stable and territorialized (Appadurai 1988; Clifford 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992, 1995), Liisa Malkki points to the sedentarist way of thinking that is naturalized with the "national order of things," i.e. the internalization of *the national as the natural* (1992:33), in which "the rooting of peoples is not only normal; it is also perceived as a moral and spiritual need." (Malkki 1992:30) She further demonstrates how one's country of origin is assumed to be the "ideal habitat" for a person and anywhere else is assumed to be utterly alien (1995:508-509). These sedentarist premises have been reinforced by botanical metaphors where one is "rooted" in a place (Malkki 1992:27), which leads to the "pathologization of uprootedness" (1992:32). This becomes especially problematic in migration research, as it reinforces the perception of displacement as a loss of identity and culture (Chatty 2014; Rosaldo 1988). 'The refugee' becomes external in the national order of things (Malkki 1992:33); (s)he becomes an anomaly.

Although the territory, or the geography, inevitably affects the elements of a culture, culture is still open to changes especially through interaction. Culture is something embodied rather than "rooted"; thus, it is mobile and prone both to influence and to be influenced. Scholars similarly suggest that culture and identity are actually "mobile and processual," (Malkki 1992:37) "multiple, complex, situational, and not stable over time" (Kertzer 2017:32). Therefore, it would be more appropriate to talk about a transformation rather than a loss of culture in cases of displacement.

As a matter of fact, Malkki argues that "the refugee" is not an anomaly, as "a generalized condition of homelessness" (Malkki 1992:25,37) pervades today's world. She suggests that "[…] more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced." (Malkki 1992:24) Nevertheless, this statement seems to trivialize displacement as a mundane phenomenon, which is equally problematic as situating "the refugee" as a misfit in "the national order of things." Although the world cyclically produces "refugees" as a result of economic and political distress, the conditions in which people are displaced are far from being ordinary, and not everyone experiences this "condition of homelessness" equally.

By designating a community center as the site of the ethnographic fieldwork and focusing on both individual experiences and the social relations of the informants, this research constantly shifts between micro- and meso-levels of analyses (see Faist 1997, 2000). Despite the limitations of language and vocabulary, it does not assume a Syrian culture or identity that is unitary, homogenous, stable, or territorialized (see Appadurai 1988; Clifford 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Kertzer 2017; Malkki 1992, 1995). This thesis does not "pathologize" displacement (see Malkki 1992), yet it does not trivialize the experience of displacement, either. Neither does it dramatize the experience of displacement by evoking painful memories. Rather, it takes displacement as a background while *descending into the everyday* (Das 2000:219, 2007:74). Lastly, this research aims at contributing to the existing literature on Syrians in Turkey and the broader academic discussion on boundaries by illustrating how the processes of making- and (un)contesting boundaries coincide at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians in Istanbul.

1.6. The "language barrier"

The language difference may be one of the sharpest barriers for Syrians living in Turkey, as it is a vital aspect of Syrian people's everyday interactions with Turkish citizens—both with state officials and ordinary citizens. I prefer opening a sub-section on the "language barrier" here rather than discussing it dispersedly in the following chapters, as the language issue is so ubiquitous and is always in the background. Nonetheless, the reader will continually be reminded of the language barriers throughout the thesis.

The official language of the Syrian Arab Republic is Arabic. In addition to Arabic, the Kurdish language is also widely used among Kurdish-Syrians. The modern Arabic language might be divided into two main forms: The standard Arabic, which is widely used in the media as well as in the literary texts; and the colloquial Arabic, which might roughly be summarized as spoken Arabic. The colloquial Arabic has innumerous variations, usually depending on the region where it is spoken: Egyptians, Libyans, Moroccans, Palestinians, Saudis, and Syrians thus all speak in different colloquials. Additionally, even the same colloquial language has various accents that are again associated with particular regions. For example, a Syrian from Damascus could likely distinguish someone from Al-Hasakah by the accent and intonation.[14] Although the accents and intonations are clearly markers of difference, which I substantiated during numerous conversations with different interlocutors, I am not sure whether this indicates a possible site of boundaries among Syrians: One day, while sitting in a tea garden, Hasna, who is from Homs, turned to me, pointed at a few men sitting at another table, and informed me, "Look, these guys are from Aleppo," without displaying any significant excitement or despise.

Although the Turkish language borrows innumerable words from the Arabic language, the alphabets and the grammar structures are completely—and the sounds are partially—different, which makes Turkish a difficult language to learn. Additionally, the same word sometimes has different meanings or connotations in Turkish than Arabic, which might generate confusion. For Syrians who do not speak Turkish or English, communi-

[14] These accents might as well be different within the same region or city.

cation with Turkish people becomes almost impossible. In fact, speaking English does not guarantee communication either, since many Turkish citizens do not speak the English language fluently. This situation inevitably engenders problems in Syrians' every-everyday interactions with ordinary Turkish citizens as well as with civil servants.[15]

While some Syrians seem to be willing to learn the Turkish language, they state that *they do not have Turkish speakers around* to practice the language constantly:

> I keep *trying* to learn Turkish but you know the situation, I am not meeting Turkish people to try to talk. But like today, I have small conversation on the phone with my landlord, and he seems like I make him understand what I want to say, and I understand most of the words, so it's okay […] I am *supposed* to be speaking in Turkish. Sometimes I'm afraid that I would not understand something that is so important for me… I always take somebody to *translate* for me. It is not easy to live in a country where you don't speak the language. (Hasna)

I will elaborate on the possible reasons why they do not practice Turkish later in detail, but as one can readily guess, this situation hints at a set of social and symbolic boundaries:

> I stayed in Gaziantep for like three years and *didn't learn a single Turkish word*. Because I didn't need to… My friends were *all Syrians*, and my work was in English and in Arabic… (Wassim)

Although Turkish-speaking Syrians are relatively advantageous in managing the daily encounters in Turkey, speaking the Turkish language does not automatically mean integration to the Turkish society: When they speak in Turkish, the accent of Syrians is often distinguishable,[16] which brings about questions regarding the place of origin. My interlocutors told me instances where they reply, "*Suriyeliyim (I am from Syria),*" and encounter overt or covert xenophobic reactions.

[15] Despite the fact that the 2014 Regulation on Temporary Protection offers free translation services at the public offices in cases where the level of communication is not sufficient (RTP 2014:Article 31), I have not encountered any instances where this was provided to Syrians.

[16] There might be some exceptions with Turkish-speaking Syrians, especially with Kurdish-Syrians, as their Turkish accent often resembles the "southeastern-accent" of the Turkish language. I believe this resemblance is related to the linguistic structure of Kurmancî, but it is beyond the scope of this research and needs further linguistic analysis.

My daily conversations with my informants, on the other hand, comprise the Arabic, English, and Turkish languages. The most dominant language of communication is English, although some of my informants speak Turkish fluently. As a half-Egyptian Turkish citizen, my lack of excellence and command in Arabic was a surprise and a source of amusement for my informants. They often ask me how I am or tell me a few basic words in the Egyptian dialect, and see if I could understand and respond in the Egyptian dialect. Alternatively, I form some basic sentences in Turkish and see if they could understand and respond in Turkish. Nevertheless, most of our Arabic conversations are conducted in the Syrian dialect, as I have learned the colloquial in time. If they speak amongst each other, the conversation usually continues in Arabic even if they start it in English. I could understand and follow conversations in Arabic without any major problems, which facilitated my participation in conversations as well as my observations, yet I dominantly respond in English or in Turkish. In response, my interlocutors dominantly respond in English or Arabic, and seldom in Turkish—if they do not speak the Turkish language fluently.

1.7. The outline of the thesis

In this thesis, I initially try to identify and understand the legal, social, and symbolic boundaries that trouble everyday lives of displaced Syrians in Istanbul. To that end, Chapter 2 focuses on the current legal framework in Turkey, while Chapter 3 focuses on the everyday practices and interactions of individuals. Then, I shift the attention to the community center in Chapter 4 to illustrate its significance in people's everyday lives and the roles that the community center plays in contesting the boundaries.

The Turkish state's relationship with displaced Syrians constitutes a significant set of boundaries. In Chapter 2, I first draw a brief genealogy of Turkey's asylum policy in order to provide a framework for the collective legal status of Syrians in Turkey. Secondly, I introduce the *temporary protection* status, which entered into force in early 2014 with the new Law on Foreigners and International Protection. I illustrate how temporary protection appears as a third space, or a blurred area, between illegality and full-fledged legality, since Syrians under temporary protection are neither undocument-

ed aliens nor "proper" asylum seekers,[17] and how this situation creates a *legal limbo* both on paper and in practice. Then I discuss the extent to which temporarily protected Syrians have access to rights and services outlined in the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which entered into force in late 2014. Lastly, I delineate other cases where my informants do not hold the temporary protection status. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the terms "transit country," "destination country," and "host country" in the light of my fieldwork.

Chapter 3 aims at demonstrating how everyday activities and interactions of my informants, both among themselves and with ordinary Turkish citizens, become socially and symbolically bounded by focusing on the work, dwelling, and socializing practices. It illustrates the ways in which these confinements reflect in the social space. The making of social and symbolic boundaries between displaced Syrians and the Turkish citizens seems to be a bilateral practice, despite a seemingly unanimous discourse among my informants about the "similarity" of Syrian and Turkish cultures.

In Chapter 4, the analytical lens shifts from the individual experiences of my informants towards the collective experiences revolving around the community center. I will first explain how this community center was initiated, meanwhile elucidating how my informants' paths cross. Then I will discuss the significance and the role of this place in overcoming or circumventing the boundaries described in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Lastly, I will problematize the issue of uncontested boundaries.

In conclusion, I will reiterate how the processes of making and contesting boundaries become an everyday practice, and finally outline the limitations of this research.

[17] A collective granting of Turkish citizenship, despite all the rumors, is not in the horizon either.

CHAPTER 2

LEGAL BOUNDARIES

> […] the collective treatment (of refugees) does not rest on the separation of the 'humanitarian' from the 'political', but on the increasing confusion between the two. (Fassin 2005:368)

2.1. A genealogy of Turkey's immigration policy

At the international level, the United Nations' 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol establish the legal basis of the international protection regime. The 1951 Geneva Convention defines the term "refugee" as follows:

> As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (U.N. Convention 1951)

The 1951 Convention was initially restricted to "persons who became refugees due to events occurring in Europe."[18] The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees attempted to remove the geographical and time limits that were part of the 1951 Convention. Turkey, as one of the signatory states to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, has kept the geographical limitation in spite of having removed the temporal limit. As a result, Turkey has officially accepted a total of 43 people as refugees up until today (Erdoğan 2015:45), since it grants refugee status only to those who are from European states (i.e. Council of Europe member-

[18] UNHCR. 2010. "The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." Retrieved June 30, 2018 (http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10).

states). Turkey had no further legal framework for regulating asylum and ensuring asylum seekers' basic rights –especially regarding those who come from non-European countries and those who arrive on a mass scale. For non-European asylum seekers, the Turkish state had authorized the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the *UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR*) to deal with the processes of registration, determination of status and third-country resettlement.

The Turkish 1994 Asylum Regulation, which was passed in response to the refugee flow from Iraq (Öztürk 2015:353-354), has brought the two-tiered system: Asylum seekers had to apply simultaneously to the UNHCR and to the Turkish state authorities, still waiting for a third-country resettlement. In 2006, the Turkish state made several revisions to the 1934 Settlement Law in accordance with the EU standards, such as the regulation of the period of asylum seeking applications (Biner 2014:83).

The need for proper laws and regulations became blatant after the influx of people from Syria started in 2011. The Turkish government passed the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (*Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu*) in April 2013 and the Regulation on Temporary Protection (*Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği*) in October 2014. As required by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), the Directorate General of Migration Management (*Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü*) was established under the Ministry of Interior, which is now the responsible institution for asylum matters.[19] Hence, the complicated processes of asylum in Turkey were organized and gathered under a single roof.

With the entry of the LFIP and the Regulation on Temporary Protection (the Regulation, or RTP) into force, Syrians, addressed as *guests* (*misafir*) so far, were granted the status of *temporary protection* (*geçiçi koruma*). While the term *guest* has no equivalence in national or international law, the term *temporary protection* was invented for dealing with urgent mass-scale flows (Erdoğan 2015:58), which also provides access to basic needs, such as education and healthcare. Nevertheless, not everyone who comes from Syria is currently under temporary protection, as will be explained below.

[19] T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 2017. "Genel Müdürlük." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/genel-mudurluk_273_274_275_icerik).

2.2. Temporary protection as legal limbo

"What Syrians in Turkey need is to be accepted as refugees. We are *still* guests here, we don't have rights," notes Siyamend during our interview, conducted in April 2018, almost four years after the LFIP and the RTP entered into force. Displaced Syrians were no longer *guests* in Turkey –at least on paper, yet the feeling still pervades.

Article 3 of the Regulation on Temporary Protection defines "temporary protection" as follows:

> The protection that may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation or have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey individually during this period of mass influx, seeking immediate and temporary protection, and whose demand for international protection cannot be evaluated individually. (RTP 2014, author's translation)

What the temporary protection status offers is an ID card (*kimlik*, as many Syrians call it) with a Foreigner's ID Number (*Yabancı Kimlik Numarası, YKN*), which is supposed to provide access to healthcare, education, employment, social welfare, and translation services. Before discussing the extent to which these services are actually provided,[20] I am going to illustrate how temporary protection status creates a *legal limbo*.

Ironically, Syrians are deprived of some fundamental rights while being recognized as legally present in Turkey. Temporary protection status, by definition, does not guarantee international protection, which may come in forms of asylum, conditional asylum, or subsidiary protection (see LFIP 2013:Articles 61, 62, 63). In fact, Article 16 of the Regulation precludes access to international protection if one is under temporary protec-

[20] Many NGOs also address cases of arbitrary implementation and treatment, where refugees have limited access to the services. See: Amnesty International. 2015. "Turkey: EU Risks Complicity in Violations as Refugees and Asylum-Seekers Locked Up and Deported." Retrieved June 5, 2017 (http://www.amnesty.eu/en/news/press-releases/region/balkans-turkey/turkey-eu-risks-complicity-in-violations-as-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-locked-up-and-deported-0951/#.WfIea617GqA); International Crisis Group. 2016. "Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence." Retrieved June 5, 2017 (https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkey-s-refugee-crisis-politics-permanence); Human Rights Watch. 2016. "EU: Don't Send Syrians Back to Turkey: Lack of Jobs, School, Health Care Spurs Poverty, Exploitation." Retrieved June 5, 2017 (https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/20/eu-dont-send-syrians-back-turkey); Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı. 2016. "A Road Map for the Education of Syrians in Turkey: Opportunities and Challenges." Retrieved June 5, 2017 (http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20160909223717_a-road-map-for-the-education-of-syrians-in-turkey-pdf.pdf).

tion (RTP 2014). While the temporary protection status prevents access to asylum and third-country resettlement, it further limits the residency rights in Turkey. Article 25 of the Regulation states:

> Temporary protection identification document provides the right to stay in Turkey. Nevertheless, this document is not equivalent to residence permit or to any other substitutive document regulated by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection; it does not qualify the holder for switching to the long-term residence permit; the duration of temporary protection is not taken into consideration when calculating the period of residency; and it does not provide the right to apply for Turkish citizenship. (RTP 2014, author's translation)

Scholars have long discussed the *legal production of illegality* (Chavez 2014; De Genova 2014; Heyman 2014), which may occur in various ways. For instance, if a person enters a country legally, i.e. with valid documentation, but overstays one's visa, (s)he would fall into illegality. Likewise, if an asylum seeker's application is rejected but (s)he keeps staying in the country of asylum without any valid document, one would fall into illegality. Syrians under temporary protection are not *undocumented aliens*, as the LFIP and the RTP acknowledge and regulate the presence of displaced Syrians in Turkey. One might thus suppose that "legal production of illegality" is not applicable to the case of Syrians under temporary protection. However, the temporary protection status is flimsy, and there are ways in which Syrians could fall into illegality[21] in spite of being registered in Turkey.

Yasemin Soysal (1994, 1998), whose ideas are grounded on Western liberal democracies, once anticipated that the rights of *denizens*, i.e. those who possess substantial rights and privileges based on long-term residence (1998:190), are continuously expanding. Thus, she argued, eventually there may be little difference between a citizen and a denizen in terms of rights. Scholars have challenged Soysal's argument from different perspectives (see Bauböck 2010; Benhabib 2004; De Genova 2015b). Some of these critiques may be reiterated by focusing on the temporary protection status for Syrians in Turkey: Although granting some rights, it is questionable whether temporary protection is a form of *denizenship*, given that Soysal's definition of "denizen" requires long-term residency. Temporary protection status does not juridically open the path for

[21] I will provide such instances in Chapter 3.

long-term residency; nevertheless, as the tumult in Syria continues, Syrians in Turkey become de facto long-term residents.

Saskia Sassen (2002) introduces the term *unauthorized yet recognized*, through which she contends that some practices of undocumented migrants are forms of citizenship practices. She employs the term in explaining how undocumented migrants are actually part of and contributors to the host society. While she argues that migrants—documented or undocumented—earn citizenship claims by earning fellow members' recognition via daily involvements in the community (2002:12-14), her understanding of authorization seems to be confined to legal presence. The situation faced by the displaced Syrians in Turkey, on the other hand, shows how authorization is further related to complex sets of rights and access to services. Just as authorization, recognition might as well be understood in juridical terms, but Sassen shifts her lens towards the society to understand recognition. The same term, *unauthorized yet recognized*, could as well be employed in explaining how legal recognition of Syrians and their deprivation from certain rights go hand in hand in Turkey, although this requires a divergence from Sassen's conceptualizations of authorization and recognition.

It is uncertain whether Syrians' rights would be expanded in the future; however, from being *just guests* to obtaining temporary protection, Syrians have already gained some rights and *relative privileges* (Parla 2011) that many of those who are in/eligible to seek international protection in Turkey do not possess. Then, why does Siyamend say that they are "still guests" in Turkey? Apparently, he does not think that they are *undocumented*. Neither does he feel that Syrians might obtain a *better* status en masse in the near future that would have minimal difference than obtaining Turkish citizenship. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Regulation on Temporary Protection put Syrians in a very special *legal limbo* (see Baban et al. 2017; Chavez 2014; Genç et al. 2018; Gonzales 2011; Kıvılcım 2016; Menin 2017; Perera 2007; Şaul 2014; Woods 2016) that hinders them from gaining certain rights exactly by legislating their presence. They are "still guests," speaking with Siyamend's terms because they do not have rights like *legal residents* or *proper asylum seekers*.

I ask Hasna, "Would you go out of Turkey if you had the chance?" She replies:

> For one reason… It is my decision to stay here if they (the Turkish state) treat us as *real refugees*. Because here we are not *refugees*, we are not *normal people*, we don't have *citizenship*. Maybe the only reason that makes me accept to change the place and go out of Turkey is to have *good papers*… (Hasna)

Is being displaced an anomaly? According to Hasna, not necessarily. A *real refugee* as well is a displaced person, but (s)he has clearly defined rights. In Hasna's terms, what makes Syrians in Turkey *abnormal* seems to be the absence of a well-grounded set of rights, i.e. the absence of *good papers*.

Hasna and her teenager son Ziyad legally came to Turkey in 2013. She and her ex-husband got divorced more than a decade ago. Her ex-husband is now residing and naturalized in Europe. Hasna's initial purpose was to obtain a visa for Ziyad in Turkey and to return to Syria after sending him off to his father. "I came here (Istanbul) with this little bag, because my plan to stay here was maximum for one month, not more," says Hasna. However, as the situation in her hometown got worse, she decided to stay in Turkey for a longer while. Two months later, she explains, his father sent Ziyad back to Turkey after a huge fight. She continues:

> At that moment, going back to Syria was not a choice anymore. I left Syria for Ziyad, I am not going to return to Syria with him. I was not afraid of myself. But this fear, everytime my son going out, maybe it's the last time that I'm seeing him… It is not a way to live. (Hasna)

Hasna obtained a residence permit in Turkey at first and switched to the temporary protection the following year, meantime trying to register herself to the UN. Her application for asylum was first accepted by UNHCR and forwarded to U.S. officials.[22] In the meanwhile, Ziyad had the chance to get a scholarship to continue her studies in the United States; thus, he left Turkey without his mother. While expecting to reunite with his son, Hasna was later informed that her application is rejected—informally being told that "she might not be safe" in the United States.

What do, then, *good papers* mean to Hasna?

[22] This situation seems to be in contradiction with the LFIP and the RTP. I will elaborate on similar cases below.

Syrians under temporary protection cannot obtain travel documents issued by the Turkish state, as they are not under international protection, i.e. they are not *full-fledged refugees*. Some possess Syrian passports, which may still be issued at the Consulate of the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul—if one pays hundreds of dollars and waits for months. Many people do not even try to obtain a passport for touristic purposes, as having a Syrian passport almost automatically means the rejection of one's visa application. Moreover, if a Syrian citizen under temporary protection is eligible to travel to another country, (s)he is obliged to notify the Turkish authorities and get a permission to leave, which will result in cancellation of the temporary protection status and obscure the possibility of returning to Turkey. Syrians under temporary protection have to obtain travel permissions not only for traveling to other countries but also to other cities in Turkey.[23]

> … to have *good papers*, if I visit my son. Okay, I don't want to live in the United States, I prefer to live here. But here I cannot visit my son. I cannot even move outside Istanbul. Some of the rules are making our lives so hard. (Hasna)

A citizen or a *real refugee* would hold *good papers*, which would not restrict one's mobility rights. Hasna's main concern, being able to visit her son—or her son being able to visit her, is currently impossible with a limited degree of movement. Although enabling access to certain rights and services, the RTP precludes access to some other rights and services, and the right to travel is only one of them. Bounded to live in Istanbul for an indefinite period of time, temporarily protected Hasna feels that she is entrapped in "a beautiful prison."

> So, if there is any chance to be in any country giving me *good papers*, make me –if I decide to visit my son, to visit my friends… You know, most of my friends in Europe. Germany, Sweden… Everywhere… To visit, to see the world… It is okay, I'll accept that. (Hasna)

[23] In fact, the movement of other groups of asylum seekers is also restricted to the designated satellite cities (see Biehl 2015; Biner 2014; Shakhsari 2014).

2.3. Bounded by uncertainty and contradiction

Although the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Regulation on Temporary Protection organize the processes of international and temporary protection, they still create ambiguity. In this regard, the rules implemented by the LFIP and RTP might be divided into two main groups: The first consists of *open-ended rules*, which are the rules that may change anytime without necessary justification. The second group includes the *rules* that are *open to dispute*, either due to ambiguous wording or due to the discrepancy between the ideal and the practice.

Hasna explains the precarity, stemming from what I call *open-ended rules*, as follows:

> I think nobody feels settled here (in Turkey). We are always afraid of (the possibility) of a new rule or decision that throws us out of Turkey, or something like this… (Hasna)

The temporary protection status is *temporary* by definition. *Governing through uncertainty* (Biehl 2015; Soysüren and Danış 2014), the Turkish state keeps the *deportability* (De Genova 2002, 2007, 2014; De Genova and Peutz 2010) of temporarily protected Syrians at its sole discretion. Article 11, Clause 1 of the RTP remarkably states:

> The Ministry (of Interior) may propose the termination of temporary protection to the Cabinet. Temporary protection shall be terminated by the Cabinet decision. (RTP 2014, author's translation)

With the decision of termination, the Cabinet may decide whether the temporarily protected would return to their country of former habitual residence or stay in Turkey to be granted another collective status or to be evaluated as seekers of international protection. (RTP 2014: Article 11, Clauses 2a,b,c) The Cabinet, by law, has the power to alter the status of Syrians collectively; and there is no binding rule that would protect the rights of Syrians in such a situation.

The second group of rules, *rules* that are *open to dispute*, constitute a major source of confusion.[24] Such an instance is the Article 16 of the RTP, which, as I already stated above, precludes access to international protection:

> Individual applications for international protection by foreigners within the scope of this Regulation are not processed within the time period that temporary protection is in force, for the purpose of carrying out the temporary protection measures effectively. (RTP 2014, author's translation)

The Article, prima facie, seems unequivocal; nevertheless, Articles 12, 44, and 50 of the RTP acknowledge the possibility of third-country resettlement for those who are temporarily protected. My fieldwork affirms that third-country resettlement is rare but still possible. I have met people from Syria who were/are under temporary protection, yet still gained international protection in countries like Canada, France, and Germany, and either left or are about to leave Turkey. The majority of these cases were family reunifications (see Baban et al. 2017:48); other cases were due to the necessity of medical treatment, and some others had no emergency situation at all.

2.4. Granted on paper, limited in practice

Although, on paper, temporary protection ID card (*kimlik*) enables access to basic services such as education and healthcare, the reality is rather intricate. The lack of information and coordination between institutions—and even among officers within the same institution—results in inconsistent implementations of already-ambiguous laws and regulations. Government office(r)s do not seem to follow a consistent procedure, which creates confusion and frustration. Access to a particular service or obtaining a necessary document is often at the mercy of the officers, with incongruous procedures and nontransparent decision-making processes. This situation further exacerbates the mercurial character of the legal boundaries imposed on Syrians in Turkey. In addition to the lack of information and coordination, and arbitrary implementation, my interlocutors describe instances where they have to deal with officers with negligent and impolite attitudes, not only in public institutions but also in private establishments such as banks.

[24] The so-called EU-Turkey refugee deal itself is a major source of confusion. See: Migration Policy Institute. 2016. "The Paradox of the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal." Retrieved July 13, 2018 (https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/paradox-eu-turkey-refugee-deal).

One evening, while sitting and chatting as a few people, we started to show our ID pictures to each other. While exchanging driving licenses, library cards, kimliks, and laughing at each other's photos, Hasna showed me her kimlik, at first only for the picture. Then, she continued, "Look, I am married in Turkey." Indeed, the marital status section on her temporary protection ID card stated that she is married. I was bewildered, and asked, "But aren't you divorced?" She replied,

> Yes, I even showed them the divorce papers, but the woman at Göç İdaresi (the officer who registers the information) said that I have to get signature from the Syrian Consulate. So, I didn't. They all (officers) say different things. Somebody else (another officer) could accept the same papers. (Hasna)

Once I entered the community center and found Nasser in disquiet. It was a few days before his travel abroad for continuing his education. I asked him what was going on, he told me that he could not get the travel permission on the grounds that he was a university graduate.[25] "But I am not, I have one class left and it is already on the transcript. I showed them… I tried to tell them but they didn't listen." The next day he went there again—but this time with a Turkish friend, and he easily obtained the travel permission when his friend explained the same situation in Turkish.[26]

During our interview, Miran similarly remarks, "I think they (the government officers) should be more organized." When I ask him what he means by "organized," he replies,

> For example, this renewing kimlik place… If they (officials) want to do their jobs in a better way, they would organize people in a better way. And there would be, like, places on the internet, so no one has to go and wait in the line for hours and hours. And maybe a lot of them do not get there and have to come back on the second day. Their system is not very good. (Miran)

Yousef, on the other hand, thinks that many things are systematic in Turkey; Syrians just are not well informed about the rules. He suggests,

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[25] The media has also covered this issue as a "rumor" that the educated Syrians are not given the permission to leave Turkey. See: T24. 2016. "Türkiye, eğitimli Suriyelilerin yurt dışına çıkışına izin vermiyor." Retrieved Aug. 28, 2017 (http://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiye-egitimli-suriyelilerin-yurt-disina-cikisina-izin-vermiyor,362034).

[26] The language certainly limits the communication; however, the attitude of the officers here is equally worth attention.

> There is crime and punishment here. For example, electricity, water, internet… In Syria, if people move, they just leave the internet in the old house and do not pay the *faturas* (bills). Here it's not like that. The Turkish state should explain Syrians their rights and responsibilities. (Yousef)

The legal boundaries that are supposed to be well-defined by the Law and the Regulation thus become unpredictable by the apparent lack of information and coordination between and among government office(r)s. As a consequence, arbitrary implementation becomes almost inescapable, and my informants as well are aware of the situation. In some cases they might not care, as Hasna did not care whether she is registered as married or divorced; yet in other cases, arbitrary implementations might become a serious problem.

2.4.1. Access to healthcare

> Miran: I went to hospital one time…
> Ayşe: …and it was awful (laughs).
> Miran: (Laughs) Actually, yes… I waited in the line for 3-4 hours…

Syrians under temporary protection see access to healthcare and medication as one of the greatest advantages of their legal status. Temporarily protected Syrians, similar to Turkish citizens, can go to public hospitals and get treatment as well as prescriptions without making any payments. This, actually, is a *relative privilege* (Parla 2011) that some migrants and asylum seekers, mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran, do not possess. Nevertheless, the extent to which Syrians have access to the healthcare system is dubious. One may readily see the pattern in hospital experiences: Waiting in line for hours despite having an appointment, problems in communication, inattentive doctors and nurses… In fact, hearing these stories was hardly surprising for me, as a Turkish citizen who knows the general condition of public hospitals in Turkey. At some point, I found myself repeatedly telling, "It is not because you are Syrian; it is the same for Turkish citizens, too."[27] However, my informants more frequently comment on the "lack of competency" of some Turkish doctors than perceiving the negligence as discrimination. Thus, most of my interlocutors state that they prefer visiting Turkish public hospitals only if they have minor health issues that would improve with antipyretics or

[27] But, of course, there was a difference: A Turkish citizen could always fill a complaint in cases of neglect and impoliteness. A Syrian citizen, however, is expected to be docile by the virtue of her/his "inferior" status.

antibiotics. On the other hand, they prefer visiting Syrian health clinics if they think they might have a serious health problem.[28]

2.4.2. Access to education

Due to ethical concerns, I did not ask any formal or informal questions to any children coming to the community center. Nor did I specifically inquire about children's access to education in my formal interviews with adults. Therefore, my information about the experiences of access to primary and secondary education under temporary protection is confined to my encounters and my participation in daily conversations.

> The difficulties that they (the children) face in Turkish schools, we try to help them to integrate in general… We register a lot of Syrian kids to school, but after two weeks the whole kids left the school. Not only because there is discrimination, but there is *feeling* you can't explain it to the people… If there is no language, if there is no communication… It's not that "Yes, we accept the children at school, the Syrian at Turkish school." Turkish schools, they haven't the capacity to accept extra 300.000 children.[29] They need new building, to have more teachers, to do a lot of things. They distribute the books, which are in Turkish. Syrian, they can't read the book, they need to… The school does a lot of things to solve the problem, but in general it's not enough. This is why the kids go out, they come here (to the community center) –we find ourselves suddenly as a school. But we are not a school! We can't… You need to go to the school… (Salem)

Parents and/or guardians seem to have difficulty in finding proper schools to enroll their children. This situation has to do both with the Turkish public schools' incapability of including the children of displaced Syrians and with broader problems regarding the integration of Syrian and Turkish communities. I have witnessed other instances where some high schools do not admit children of displaced Syrians—asserting that they can only be enrolled in İmam-Hatip high schools, which actually is not the case. Many children learn the Turkish language quickly by hearing it, as they were either born in Turkey or came to Turkey at a very early age; nevertheless, children seem to have prob-

[28] Here, the language barrier has a significant impact. While grounding their reason of preference, my informants brought up the language issue, and stated that they want to explain and to know "what exactly" the problem is. These private clinics seem to be widely known and especially prevalent in districts populated by high numbers of Syrians.

[29] This is not an up-to-date number of school-age Syrian children. For a more up-to-date information regarding the Syrian children's access to education in Turkey, see: Eğitim Reformu Girişimi. 2017. "Bir Arada Yaşamı ve Geleceği Kapsayıcı Eğitimle İnşa Etmek." Retrieved June 30, 2018 (http://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/yayin/kapsayici-egitim/#more-6382).

lems at schools in terms of adaptation. I have heard anecdotes, where children from various age groups either dropped or want to drop the school.

The case of higher education does not seem dissimilar to the cases of primary and secondary education. Some of the young adults actually managed to get into universities in Turkey; yet, many others are still unable to go beyond wishing to continue their education in the future (see Hohberger 2017, 2018). Yousef says, "My dream is to finish studying and teach at the university." Nevertheless, gathering necessary documents for application, fulfilling language and other examination requirements, and scarcity of financial resources all constitute barriers for young Syrians. Many young Syrians are expected to—and indeed have to—contribute to their household income. When I ask Miran what his most important problem is, he replies, "I want to continue studying but I couldn't, because I have to gain money at the same time." Studying and working simultaneously is quite challenging, and scholarships available to Syrians in Turkey are still very limited. Hence, many young adults like Miran and Yousef do not see studying in Turkey as a viable option and try to explore opportunities abroad. As a matter of fact, quite a few of my interlocutors—including Amir, Ciwan, Nasser, and Farhad—managed to gain scholarships abroad and currently continue their education either in Europe or in North America.

2.4.3. Access to the labor market

Article 29 of the RTP concludes that "the temporarily protected may work in some professions and regions designated by the suggestion of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the approval of the Cabinet," though requiring an extra work permit (RTP 2014). However, the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection (*Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine Dair Yönetmelik*), effective from January 2016 on, does not reiterate this limiting clause.[30] Instead, without designating specific sectors or regions—except for agriculture and husbandry sectors, which do not require work permits—the 2016 Regulation on Work Permits states that those who are under temporary protection for at least six months may apply for work permits. Although individual application is also possible, the 2016

[30] T.C. Resmi Gazete. 2016. "Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine Dair Yönetmelik." Retrieved May 10, 2018 (http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/01/20160115-23.pdf).

Regulation on Work Permits holds the employers responsible for applying for the work permit on behalf of the temporarily protected employee. The Regulation on Work Permits further sets a maximum of 10 percent quota for employing those under temporary protection (RWPFTP 2016).

Although Article 4 of the Regulation on Work Permits clearly states that the temporarily protected cannot be employed without a work permit, the number of employed people with work permits seems quite low,[31] whereas the majority of Syrians still work informally (Danış 2016; Kaya 2017a; Kılıçaslan 2016). In fact, among my informants, Siyamend is the only person who currently holds both a temporary protection ID card and a work permit, yet he notes that he has problems regarding renewing it. Although having a work permit along with the temporary protection status is viable, the work permits need to be renewed each year, as they may only be given for a maximum of 12 months.[32]

2.4.4. Access to social welfare and services

Article 30 of the RTP states that those who are temporarily protected and in need may benefit from social welfare and services, organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (RTP 2014:Article 30). When I bring up the issue, Siyamend informs me, "There is this Kızılay SUY card, but they don't give it to everyone.[33] It has some preconditions (*şartları var*)."[34] Nevertheless, the public perception concerning the widespread dependence of Syrians on social welfare still needs to be challenged.

During the formal interviews, when I asked the question "do you benefit from any kind of social or material support provided by the Turkish state," all the answers were "no." "I don't want charity," says Yousef fiercely, "You know, in Syria, we have almost no

[31] T.C. Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı. 2016. "Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri." Retrieved May 11, 2018 (https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/7315/yabancilarin-%C3%A7ali%C5%9Fma-%C4%B0z%C4%B0nler%C4%B0-2016.pdf).

[32] T.C. Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı. 2016. "Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine Dair Uygulama Rehberi." Retrieved May 23, 2018 (https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/6248/gkkuygulamarehberi1.pdf).

[33] Mülteciler Derneği. 2018. "Suriyeliler Devletten Maaş Alıyor mu?" Retrieved June 8, 2018 (https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyeliler-devletten-para-aliyor-mu/).

[34] Kızılaykart Yabancılara Yönelik Sosyal Uyum Yardım Programı (SUY). 2017. "SUY Hakkında." Retrieved June 8, 2018 (http://kizilaykart-suy.org/TR/faq0.html).

beggars; we feel that it is shameful to ask for help." Miran replies, "No… I haven't seen that the Turkish state has done anything for me except for kimlik," which provides free access to healthcare. Still, according to the Turkish Red Crescent's data, 1.3 million Syrians have the SUY Card, which provides 120 Turkish Liras per month.[35]

2.5. Syrians without temporary protection

As I stated in the introduction, not everyone coming from Syria is necessarily a Syrian citizen. There are also Palestinian refugees from Syria, who, according to my observations, are basically treated as "all Syrians" by the Turkish officials. Although my analysis was on the temporary protection status by so far, not everyone from Syria is currently under temporary protection; Syrians in Turkey have diverse legal status. During my fieldwork, I met people who hold residence permits –some combined with work permits, people who obtained Turkish citizenship, and people who are still not registered.

Those who possess residence permits in Turkey are more fortunate as they can travel without having to get permission from the Turkish state. Moreover, they can apply for citizenship after five years of uninterrupted residency.[36] Nevertheless, those who hold residence permits confront problems in Turkey, too. "I need to renew my *ikamet* but they refuse to renew it," says Said while we are chatting on the street. Hearing his story does not even surprise me since I know that many people are lately having problems with renewing their residence permits in Turkey, regardless of the nation of origin.

For the last couple of years, the Turkish state has started to undermine the activities of many international NGOs operating in Turkey; as a result; most of them shut down their offices in Turkey. Hence, renewing work permits become impossible for many foreigners (including Syrians) who are employed in those NGOs. Furthermore, many people obtain residency through their work permits, which means that their residence permits

[35] The statement of the Turkish Red Crescent's President. He also underscores that the aid programme is completely funded by the European Union. See: Habertürk. 2018. "Kızılay Başkanı Kerem Kınık: Suriyelilerin yarısı dönmez." Retrieved June 10, 2018 (https://www.haberturk.com/kizilay-baskani-kerem-kinik-tan-suriyeli-siginmacilar-aciklamasi-1861833).

[36] T.C. 5901 Sayılı Türk Vatandaşlığı Kanunu 2009. See: T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 2017. "Türk Vatandaşlığı Kanunu." Retrieved June 5 2018 (http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/7.pdf).

automatically become difficult to renew. While European and American citizens always have the option to leave Turkey if necessary, Syrian citizens are having a hard time trying to figure out their next move.

The rumor that the Turkish state started to identify some Syrians and "add their names on a list" for granting Turkish citizenship came up several times during my fieldwork.[37] This, actually, is puzzling, as it is incongruous with the Article 25 of the Regulation on Temporary Protection (RTP 2014, also discussed above), which explicitly declares that temporary protection does not give the right to apply for Turkish citizenship. Though I could not identify a pattern regarding the procedure for granting the Turkish citizenship, I encountered a few cases, in which Syrians—either individually or as a family—obtained the Turkish citizenship.

2.6. Concluding remarks: transit country or host country?

The General Preamble (*Genel Gerekçe*) of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection acknowledges the absence of a prior law regarding international protection, as well as the disorganization and the insufficiency of preexisting regulations regarding visas and residence permits. The Preamble further states that Turkey increasingly becomes a "destination country" instead of a "transit country," referring to the country's appeal due to Turkey's "booming economy" and "political instabilities in the region."[38]

The terms used in the Preamble are not unfamiliar for social scientists, though with a caveat: Özge Biner (2014) reveals how Turkey becomes a "host country" rather than a "transit country"; however, her argument is not based on Turkey's increasing appeal but on how the application for asylum and third country resettlement processes in Turkey might take many years. Turkey might become a "destination country" for some people, but not all who arrive are willing to settle in Turkey. Despite the time spent in Turkey,

[37] This issue has also been addressed by the media. See: Hürriyet. 2017. "7 bin Suriyeliye vatandaşlık geliyor." Retrieved June 27, 2018 (http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/7-bin-suriyeliye-vatandaslik-geliyor-40514176); Cumhuriyet. 2017. "Suriyelilere vatandaşlık kutlamaları başladı... 7 bin Suriyeli için karar verildi." Retrieved June 27, 2018 (http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/817019/Suriyelilere_vatandaslik_kutlamalari_basladi..._7_bin_Suriyeli_icin_karar_verildi.html).

[38] T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 2017. "Genel Gerekçe." Retrieved July 12, 2018 (http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/genel-gerekce_327_328_330_icerik).

many people are still looking for "better options" around the so-called global North. Then, we might claim that it is not always accurate to call Turkey a "destination country". But is it more accurate to call Turkey a "host country"?

In parallel with Biner's argument (2014), Kristen Biehl (2015) uses the term "uncertainty" that is common in asylum seekers' experiences in terms of indefinite waiting, limited access to knowledge, and unpredictable legal status, all of which, according to Biner's terminology, render Turkey a "host country." Uncertainty is a common experience among displaced Syrians as well, mainly because of not knowing if the war in Syria will come to an end, or whether returning to Syria will ever be an option even if the war ends, the *legal limbo* of being temporarily protected in Turkey, and looking for alternative lives to live in a third country. "Host country" may be an accurate term, especially considering that the legal structure has a big share in why "nobody feels settled here." (Hasna) A *host* is the concomitant of a *guest*; hence, the connotations of *hosting* (*misafir etmek, ağırlamak*) confine Syrians in a "being in transit" and/or a "forever guest" position. "We are still guests here, we don't have rights," (Siyamend) is thus reaffirmed if Turkey is a "host country". Nevertheless, the term "host country" does not do justice to those who decide to settle in Turkey, since *hosting* suggests temporality (Biner and Soykan 2016) without integration or naturalization, and alienates the asylum seeker/refugee/foreigner as "always alien." Hence, the need to capture the dynamics between moving and settling implies a simultaneous need to go beyond the existing terminology.

The next chapter moves from the legal boundaries to the social and symbolic boundaries, observed in everyday interactions between Syrians and ordinary Turkish citizens outside the state institutions.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

> In the beginning when Syrians came to Turkey, the general atmosphere I felt at that time from the Turks, especially in the South, "we are brothers and sisters," so they were like "Musliman, ben Musliman," this thing… And they were trying to help, like really, especially the families, people in the neighborhood… They were always trying to bring food, bring support or anything they can. *That was the beginning…* (*laughs*) But afterwards, especially with the increased number of refugees that started coming to the country, the story changed. People started seeing the Syrians as people, like, that taking their jobs, that having less salary and destroying the market for them… Everybody, especially the rumor spread, and all of them say, "Refugees are already taking lots of money from the UNHCR, from the government." All of this was not true. Like, they only support for one year maybe, I don't know, or something, and 100-150 lira (per month) for each family, it's really nothing… But no support was coming from anybody… Only you can go to these centers for refugees, and they distribute food baskets, and it's very limited, and you have to stand in vey long queues… So, but that generated very bad reaction, especially when people hear you are *Suriyeli*… (Wassim)

3.1. Experiences at work

Although I have not visited many workplaces that my interlocutors worked in during my fieldwork, I listened to innumerable stories about jobs and employers both during formal interviews and during everyday conversations. Workplaces appear as one of the most significant sites not only to observe the economic relations but also to identify the social and symbolic boundaries. Albeit including decent jobs and kind employers, the majority of the stories that my interlocutors told were about low-skill jobs in manufacturing or service sectors, often including exploitative employers. Years after arriving in Turkey, a considerable number of Syrians have established their own businesses, such as bakeries and restaurants prevalent in particular neighborhoods (Biehl 2013:242); some engage in trade, work freelance, or work at national or international companies, including NGOs. Still, my fieldwork is in line with Kristen Biehl's statement

(2013:242) that tourism, service, and textile sectors employ many migrants in Istanbul, usually offering low-skill jobs with low salaries and no insurance.

> In the first four-five months (after arriving in Turkey), me and my brother worked in factories, restaurants, etc. just to survive… Make some money… That period was difficult. (Wassim, studied English Literature)

> You know, I am supposed to be a lawyer. And others, doctor, dentist, engineer… All of us were working in the same job. (Yousef, studied Law)

> I was a bit ashamed. It was spiritually a bit difficult. But then I told myself, "You have to do everything right now—in terms of job… So, put all those diplomas aside, in a bag, and do these jobs."[39] (Siyamend, studied Philosophy)

The majority of my informants state that they arrived in Turkey in 2013, when, on top of all other difficulties, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Regulation on Temporary Protection was not in force. At that time, as they were "guests," the only way to work legally was to have a work permit through the residence permit, which was not so common. Thus, many Syrians, regardless of entering Turkey legally or illegally, had to find a job and work informally. Among the adults with university degrees, almost no one immediately could find a job related to their actual profession. Among young adults, who left Syria when they were university students or were still in high school, the situation was similar: They found themselves in a situation where continuing education was no longer a priority, and started to work informally in jobs that had nothing to do with their career prospects.

Scholars have asserted that exploitation becomes almost inescapable in cases of illegality, i.e. being *sans-papiers* (see Holmes 2013; McNevin 2006; Khosravi 2010). This situation was no different for many Syrians who come to Turkey and started working informally. The exploitation manifests itself mainly as long working hours and low salaries:

> After four days, I started working in *atölye* (workshop)—I arrived (in Istanbul) on Friday, I started work on Wednesday—from 8:30 in the morning

[39] *Ben biraz utandım. Yani manevi olarak biraz zordu. Ama sonra kendime "Şu an yaşamak için her şeyi yapmalısın – iş olarak… Diplomaları bir kenara, bir poşete koy ve bu işleri yap," dedim.*

> until 9:30 in the evening. I worked one week like this. He (the boss) gave me 90 lira. For one week… He said "It's actually 92 lira but okay, I'm gonna give you 100 lira." Like *sadaka* (charity)… He said "If you continue I'll give you 150 lira per week." I said okay but the hours are so long. He said "*This is normal, this is Istanbul*." I thought about it, I said no, I am not going to work. I didn't go the next week. (Ciwan)

Ciwan, a young man who had to leave Syria before finishing his freshman year in Media Studies, had similar problems in each work he entered. Most of these places were textile workshops, where he worked as *ortacı*.[40]

> I said "It's so little (money)." He (the boss) said "Learn, I'm going to give you more." After one week I said "Okay, I learned a little bit." He said "No, you still need more." I worked one more week. In that week there was *mesai*—extra hours. I told him "Will you give me (extra money) for those days?" He said "No." I just left the work. (Ciwan)

Siyamend explicitly notes the instances where the business owner did not pay his salary. Besides long working hours and low salaries, working without insurance is also very common. Hasna tells me about a job she found during her first year in Turkey:

> Hasna: I found a job in a tourism company—and it is not cleaning… The only work I worked here (in Istanbul) that make me feel good… And I'm doing everything as I want in this company… But after a while, something was wrong in the company. Not just me left the job; everybody working left…
> Ayşe: Did you have insurance?
> Hasna: No, no… It's bad for both sides actually, Turkish citizens lose their jobs, and Syrians work with low salary and no insurance. And sometimes not even getting salary…

My informants tell me how they switched between informal short-term jobs, where working conditions are quite poor: From a restaurant to a tailor's shop, from a textile workshop to a printing house, from cleaning to an Internet café, from construction work to a hotel… Yousef tells me that the only informal job he loved was at a printing house, where they produced notebooks. He says he loved it because it was an easy job—unlike other jobs he had in the textile sector. The jobs with heavy working conditions seem to leave significant memories linked to the five senses, as well:

[40] The word "ortacı" has no direct translation to English. It is a position where one controls and processes the textile product before it is ready for sale. It is an intermediary job that includes controlling stitches, labeling, buttoning, and so on.

> We were making *etiket* (labeling/tagging) for clothes. I still remember *the smell*… Of the ink… The chemicals… (Yousef)
>
> I started to work at a restaurant as dishwasher, from 8:00 in the morning to 10:30 in the evening. For 25 liras, daily… I worked for four days; my hands started to crack, they started to *change*.[41] (Siyamend)

On the other hand, not all employers were or are willing to hire Syrians as informal labor, either because of racist bias, or goodwill, or the fear of being caught by the Turkish authorities:

> There are many, many *atölye*s in Okmeydanı…[42] So, we went to find a job for me. All of them, "Suriyeli misin?" I said, "Yes". They were like "No." "Suriyeli," "No." "Suriyeli," "No." "Suriyeli," "No." (Ciwan)

Ciwan tells me an instance from October 2013, before the LFIP and the RTP entered into force, when his sister—who had recently arrived in Turkey at the time—and he were suddenly fired:

> We worked there maximum one month. He (the boss) said "Guys, I'm sorry but you are *illegal* here, and if someone comes from Belediye (municipality) or something –today they were around here, you have to have work permit. If you don't have work permit, I cannot make you… There is work, there are many atölyes but I am sorry, I cannot make you work here. This is the last day for you. All of you…" My sister started to cry, for me it was okay, we are going to find another job. (Ciwan)

The Regulation on Temporary Protection (2014) and the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection (2016) paved the way for formal employment; however, the general situation seems to have changed little: As I have also noted in Chapter 2, many employers seem to ignore the regulations and continue hiring Syrians informally. Consequently, there seems to be no demarcation between before and after obtaining temporary protection status in the stories of my informants regarding the jobs that they have.

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[41] *Dört gün çalıştım; ellerim çatlamaya, değişmeye başladı.*

[42] A news article from 2008 also highlights the abundance, temporality, and the poor conditions of these textile-sector jobs. See: T24. 2008. "Herkes iş ararken onlar sürekli aranıyor." Retrieved June 15, 2018 (http://t24.com.tr/haber/herkes-is-ararken-onlar-surekli-araniyor,3367).

> In June (2015), I found a job at a small hostel in Sultanahmet. I worked there (informally) for six months. There, the work was better because I was speaking in English, and I learned more English. You know, receptionist, much better than textiles […] But I had a fight with my manager at the hotel. He want us to paint the walls, he want us to clean… So, we had this fight […] and I said, "I quit." (Ciwan)

Scholars argue that border enforcements are designed to produce an exploitable labor force (McNevin 2006; Khosravi 2010; Heyman 2014). The border enforcement, here, does not identify temporarily protected Syrians as "illegals;" nevertheless, complicating the process of accessing to the labor market in the absence of substantial rights constructs Syrians as the new exploitable labor force in Turkey. Hence, the cases of temporarily protected Syrians working in informal sectors offer another way of *legal production of illegality* (Chavez 2014; De Genova 2014; Heyman 2014).

3.2. Housing and dwelling experiences

Although reliable data on the demographical dispersion of Syrians in Istanbul barely exists, it is widely known that some districts, such as Bağcılar, Fatih, and Zeytinburnu on the European side, and Sultanbeyli on the Anatolian side, are densely—yet not exclusively—populated by Syrians.[43] These districts offer relatively reasonable housing prices, though often with poor housing conditions, and usually quick access to public transportation. Kristen Biehl asserts a similar trend regarding a different group of migrants in Istanbul:

> The choice of localities for residence are not coincidental; some of the neighborhoods are areas already inhabited by other disadvantaged migrant groups, such as the internally displaced Kurds and Roma […] Also, most of these localities are located near to various production and/or tourism centers of the city, hence offer an abundance of informal and low-skill job opportunities, particularly in the textile, confection, and service sectors. (2013:242)

While Syrians are present in large numbers in some districts of Istanbul, they are almost absent in others. Housing prices surely confine Syrians to particular neighborhoods; however, rent is not the only factor in deciding on the place to dwell. In addition to the

[43] A relatively reliable data on this issue is presented on a report published by Marmara Municipalities Union. To access the report (in Turkish), see: Marmara Belediyeler Birliği. 2017. "'Kopuş'tan 'Uyum'a Kent Mültecileri: Suriyeli Mülteciler ve Belediyelerin Süreç Yönetimi: İstanbul Örneği." Retrieved Oct. 20, 2017 (http://marmara.gov.tr/UserFiles/Attachments/2017/05/09/2a50f712-6413-489f-9deb-56dc52de7264.pdf).

proximity of businesses and employment opportunities (Biehl 2013:242), pre-existing connections, such as relatives or friends, are other factors effective in finding and choosing a house to dwell. My informants usually prefer to live close to the community center, such as in Beyoğlu, Eyüp, Fatih, Kasımpaşa, Okmeydanı, Osmanbey, and Tarlabaşı, which facilitates their everyday navigation in the city.

> My family was already here (in Istanbul), so I had to come here. They had a house in Esenler… (Miran)

> At that time I was working in that office and I rent a house also in Taksim close to my work […] Urgent situation… I kept calling people, my son will arrive tomorrow, I need a place. So all my friends were searching, like a magic happened… In one night they found this flat for me, in Tarlabaşı, so close to Taksim Square… (Hasna)

Additionally, for Kurdish-Syrians, living in Kurdish-Turkish populated neighborhoods seems to be convenient, as it facilitates everyday communication. Some of my Kurdish-Syrian interlocutors told me anecdotes where they were able to communicate with Kurdish-Turkish citizens by speaking in Kurmancî. Nevertheless, whether this is a significant factor in choosing an apartment is dubious. What my interlocutors seem to consider primarily is the proximity of the places that they visit every day, so that their mobility within the city would become easier. In fact, many of them were surprised when they learned that I commute for 30-40 minutes to come to the community center and spend more than an hour to go to the university. Often, I was suggested to move in "somewhere closer" to the community center, ideally somewhere within the walking distance.

The scale of housing conditions and prices is quite broad even within the same district; therefore, it is possible to find houses in drastically different conditions within a 10-minute walking distance. Hasna underscores the difficulty to rent a decent apartment in Istanbul with a limited budget, regardless of being Turkish or Syrian. Nonetheless, for Syrians, encountering racist bias is always a possibility:

> Winter came… We (me and my sisters) were still in that home, this relative's house… We were still living there. But we had some money, after all of us working… And my father came, he also had some money […] I told

> him (my boss) that people don't give us house for rent. I tell them I am Syrian, they say like "We don't give the Syrian…" (Ciwan)

Ciwan considers himself *lucky* for having met this employer, for whom he worked for five months until his boss shut down the workshop. He continues the story by telling me how they were able to rent a house with the help of his boss:

> He (the boss) said, "Okay, I am going to be *kefil* (sponsor). Find a house for rent and tell me." I found one, we went to that home. He said "They work for me, we are going to rent the house." The woman said, "No, we don't give Syrians," blah blah blah… He said like "I'm renting the house." He solved everything and said, "If they don't give the money per month, you can come and ask me. But each Saturday I'm giving them their money, so if it's Thursday and they tell you they're gonna give you on Saturday, okay, that's fine…" We gave her (the landlord) the deposit and everything. (Ciwan)

As in Ciwan's case, if other family members are also in Istanbul, some of my interlocutors continue living with them. Some of the adults prefer to rent an apartment and to live alone if they have enough finances. Young and single adults mostly seem to prefer having a shared flat, be it with Syrian or non-Syrian people, albeit sometimes in poor or extreme conditions:

> At that time, my sisters were in Syria, so I shared the house with my friends […] It became like a *shelter*. The house has three rooms and a big salon (living room), and we were like 14 people living in there. It was crazy. You know what, all of the people that were living with me are now in Europe. (Ciwan)

While discussing the issue of the spatial segregation of Syrians and Turkish citizens, Ciwan raises his concern about Syrians' absence in "elite" neighborhoods. He refers to another non-economic factor that seems to bind Syrians to particular neighborhoods:

> Syrian people do not live in certain neighborhoods such as Beşiktaş and Bebek, even though some of them have the money. It is somehow related to the people (*upper-class Turkish citizens*) who do not like them, so they won't accept them… Also the poor neighborhoods accept Syrians because they exploit them in work, less salaries, longer hours, et cetera… (Ciwan)

Ciwan formulates his argument in a way that the attitude of "elite" Turkish citizens towards displaced Syrians is the sole push-factor that keeps Syrians away from renting

apartments in these neighborhoods. On the other hand, my observations suggest that the absence of Syrians in those neighborhoods does not solely stem from the Turkish citizens' attitudes; rather, this situation hints at complex processes of boundary-making that generates a presence or an absence of *feelings of community*:

> In general, I know how to move inside İstanbul. For example Sultanahmet, Miniatürk, like the famous places that tourists usually go… I lived in Esenyurt for three months in my friend's house. I know Esenler very well because my son's school was there, and I tried to find a place there to live, close to the school… I used to have friends in Üsküdar, and I have friends now in Kadıköy… Like, Fatih, for sure… Eminönü… These places… (Hasna)

The spatial concentration of displaced Syrians in particular neighborhoods of Istanbul is undoubtedly a sign of social and symbolic boundaries, which I will discuss further in the next section in relation to the socializing practices.

3.3. Socializing with others

> So, I was in this club, dancing, and a (Turkish) girl came to me. She was a bit drunk. She asked me where I am from, I said, "Syria." *Her face was like…* She didn't believe me! She went away, and came back with her friend who speaks better English. They asked me again, I said, "Syrian," they didn't believe me! They were like "*No, you are Italian!*" In the end, I showed my ID. She was like "*Ohhh*, what are you doing here, you should get out of this country…" (Said)

Said, a nice-looking young man, told this story while we were hanging out as a group. He was obviously annoyed by the incident, but he did not seem to care a lot either. In fact, after listening to the story, we all started to laugh and make jokes about how he should have played "the Italian," because all of us were used to coming across these kinds of incidents. Everyone knew the "face" the girl made: A look of incomprehension; a combination of surprise, confusion, despise, and pity. In another instance, Wassim told me a very similar story about the time when he joined the gym:

> The woman at the reception requested my passport for registration. I gave it. She looked at the passport, Syrian… And she was like… (*He imitates a bewildered face and then laughs*) (Wassim)

In a city with more than half a million Syrian inhabitants, why were these women surprised to encounter a Syrian citizen in an average club or a local gym? What makes these encounters so unexpected?

Pierre Bourdieu suggests that particular lifestyles, i.e. tastes and practices, are affiliated with specific classes (Bourdieu 1984). He further asserts, "Social space tends to function as a symbolic space, a space of lifestyles and status groups characterized by different lifestyles." (Bourdieu 1989:20) Then, the club and the gym, as social/symbolic spaces, seem to be characterized by a lifestyle—thereby, by a class—that is not attributed to "Syrian refugees," at least by these women. On the other hand, one may argue that Said's and the woman's participation in the club is not affected by an apparent inequality of *economic, cultural,* or *social capital* (Bourdieu 1986) they possess. In fact, if we consider speaking a foreign language as a form of *cultural capital*, then, we might even argue that the woman possesses less cultural capital than Said, as Said notes that she does not speak English well. Wassim's case is not so different, either.

> […] Agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital that they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is, *the relative weight* of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets. (Bourdieu 1989:17)

The women are puzzled when they come across Said and Wassim because they presume that a Syrian does not hold the necessary *symbolic capital*, i.e. the *legitimate competence* (Bourdieu 1986), to be present at a club or a gym. They assume that they belong to a "lower" class; whose practices should not include membership to a local gym or having a night out in a club, as they should "averse to different lifestyles" (Bourdieu 1984:56). On the other hand, neither Said nor Wassim feel obliged to avoid being present in the very same spaces. The issue here is that Bourdieu's delineation of the forms of capital assumes a fixed standpoint, hence, equal dispositions in relation to one another. Conversely, there does not seem to be a point of omniscience where one objectively assesses the level of the embodiment of the forms of capital in a person, as it would vary drastically according to each person's perception. Similarly, dispositions between two people or groups are not objective; they are subjective and will rarely be perceived equally.

Said's and Wassim's cases are inseparable from Ciwan's concern about Syrians' absence in "upper-class" neighborhoods, where Syrians do not prefer dwelling because, speaking in Ciwan's terms, upper-class Turkish citizens "do not like" and "will not accept" Syrians "even though they have the money." Similarly, "upper-class" Turkish citizens would try to averse to social/symbolic spaces and lifestyles attributed to "Syrians." Obviously, Syrian people do not constitute a unitary social or economic class, and they may as well be dispersed in the social space. But then, why are Syrians, say a national group, altogether attributed to a particular "inferior" class in the Turkish context, and expected to averse to "other" classes and their lifestyles? What is wrong with *the relative weight* of the capital they possess?

In the instances above, the problem of "real" and "imagined" dispositions and differences between social groups and their lifestyles, in fact, goes far beyond social classes. The puzzlement that an ordinary Syrian engenders in these cases has a genuine relation to the prejudices constructed mainly by the Western media, which propagates the image of "poor fugitive;" hence, the engagement of displaced Syrians in recreational activities becomes almost *unimaginable*. Furthermore, the meanings attached to being a "Syrian refugee" in Turkey are highly related to the *orientalist* notions (Said 1979) ingrained in the Turkish national/collective memory, which represents "the Arab"[44] as historically inferior (Buke-Okyar 2017). The imagery of the "refugee," therefore, contradicts the actuality and the possible futures they may have. Ultimately, the "dislike" and "non-acceptance" seem to circumscribe Syrians not only in regard to *where* they are *supposed to* live, but also to *how* they are *supposed to* live.

My fieldwork, on the other hand, reveals that the racism among Turkish citizens towards Arabs[45] is not as apparent to my interlocutors as it is to me, a Turkish citizen who went through the Turkish national curriculum. They are aware of prejudices against them to some degree, but they generally associate these prejudices with the image of "poor refugee" and/or "potential problem," which is now ubiquitous especially via the media. Although most of my informants explicitly accept the prevalence of antagonism

[44] As I have stated in the introduction, not everyone from Syria is ethnically Arab; however, Turkish citizens usually do not / cannot differentiate between ethnicities, and treat them as "all Sunni-Arabs."

[45] Same concerns as stated in the previous footnote.

towards Syrians in Turkey, as they experience it at different levels on a daily basis; they usually think that racist attitudes stem from integration problems, as Syrians suddenly had to enter and settle in Turkey in sheer numbers:

> Here, people are good in general but everyone has their problems… We bring our mentality here and try to implement it, so it doesn't work… (Yousef)

> I think there are a lot of difficulties for Syrians here. And you know, not everybody accepts us. Some places, don't like us… Yani, sometimes they have the right to be afraid, we become *so many* here. So, I don't blame anybody but that's the situation […] I have one close Turkish friend. Her husband is Syrian. We all used to work at the same company, actually… She says, "I hate Syrians." And her husband is Syrian! I am her friend, I am Syrian! "No," she says, "I hate Syrians in general." (Hasna)

The typical answer to the question of whether my interlocutors have Turkish friends was, "*Yes, but not so many*." When I wonder the reason why, the answers did not go beyond vague acknowledgements of the social and symbolic boundaries between Turkish and Syrian citizens.

> Ayşe: Do you have Turkish friends, or, *close* Turkish friends?
> Miran: I have some Turkish friends, not so many. I think I have more foreign friends than Turkish friends.
> Ayşe: Why do you think that's the case?
> Miran: I don't know… It's… Maybe they (foreigners) are *easier* to deal with. You *feel* that it's more *difficult* to deal with a Turkish person. I don't know why… *You tell me why*… Maybe because of the attitude… Language is not really a barrier. You know, I speak Turkish.

I was surprised when Siyamend told me that he feels "integrated" in Turkey, because this was the first time for me hearing this phrase from one of my informants. I, therefore, asked for clarification:

> Siyamend: I have friends at each NGO. I feel myself close to these people. I am quite integrated… They don't see me different.
> Ayşe: You mean, Turkish or international community?
> Siyamend: International…

Wassim lived in Gaziantep for the first three years after arriving in Turkey and then moved in Istanbul. The following conversation takes place while we were talking about

the life in both cities. Wassim's speech powerfully indicates the social and symbolic boundaries that pervade the daily encounters of Syrians and Turkish citizens:

> Wassim: […] After I came to Istanbul, I got *enlightened* (*laughs*), compared to my life in Gaziantep and seeing the life in there and the community… The Turks, the way I'm looking to them… Because in there, like, there was *real hatred* between Syrians and the Turks in Gaziantep. Because there are lots of Syrians and the Turkish people in there—I don't wanna say like not as open-minded as the ones in Istanbul, but there's *something weird* related to this. And it was hard for us, for them, to cope and communicate… And they didn't, there was *no willingness* from any side to *reach* the other, like, try to *explore*, at least see what this person is… Only some special cases, like those who were working with us, because they start knowing us, get to know us… Then we became friends. So, but when I came to Istanbul I realized that, no, Turkey is much better than Gaziantep, or this thing… And there are way different people that I imagined about the Turkish people… It was nicer, I liked it… In the beginning…
> Ayşe: Do you hate it now?
> Wassim: No, I don't hate it. But… (*sighs*) Other steps in my life, like, when I went to Europe… When I met people that, for example, don't… You know, there's this stuff that you *feel*, like how the others looking at you, talking with you… Even if you are not smart, intelligently smart, or emotionally smart… You can *just feel* like how this communication is… And in Europe I felt like it's way nicer. The people were, like, literally nicer, in the reaction of my identity, or my nationality. It was, like, â'dî (*normal*), yani… It's not a big deal at all. It's just, normal… And this thing, I didn't feel in here. And like… I felt like (in Europe) somehow, I don't know, maybe my experience was special, but what I felt was people were more empathetic with me as Syrian or as a person going out of war situation… That was, like, good… When I came back to Istanbul and continued living here… I don't know… *It's not here*... Although I like it but there's still *another one*, you know, *better* than this one…

Gaziantep was a city that frequently came up in my informal conversations not only with Wassim but also with others. Each time, they said, "I *hated* Gaziantep,"[46] and expressed their love of Istanbul, regardless of the main topic of the conversation. In fact, Wassim was the only one who stated that he liked his life in Gaziantep, but his life was one limited to a community of mainly Syrians. The rationale for "hatred" between Syrian and Turkish communities in Gaziantep, according to him, lies in both sides: The large number of Syrians, and "narrow-mindedness" of the Turkish-citizen residents of Gaziantep. Wassim, thus, experiences the first turning point at the moment when he

[46] Although the question why they hate Gaziantep is beyond the scope of this research, one may see other research conducted in Gaziantep (see Altunkaynak 2016; Biner and Soykan 2016).

moves to Istanbul. He "gets enlightened," becomes aware of an alternative life with more "open-minded" people. Nevertheless, soon he experiences the second turning point when he visits Europe. He realizes that the problems he points in Gaziantep exist in Istanbul, too, albeit to a lesser degree. He feels that there is a "better" life beyond Turkey; a life, which he defines according to *human relations* above anything else.

3.4. "Similar people," "similar culture"

> I decided to stay in Turkey, because it's like, quiet, safe, yani, to me it's better, and I felt that the *culture here is closer to my culture*. I don't like Europe, I don't want to be in Europe, and you know, life in Europe is not easy… (Salem)

> Here it's way more beautiful. People are more, like, *their traditions and cultures, closer to me, us, Syrians*. But me, I'm not really so proud of my Syrian (identity), my Middle East, or like, my… It's about me, yani… (Wassim)

> *I can't tell* that I know Turkish people, how they live… But *I feel like Turkish community is similar to our community*. Even the food… *I feel like I just moved to another city in Syria*—except the language. (Hasna)

> *Turkey and Syria are similar. People, culture is also similar…* But Istanbul is bigger […] Even if I had other options, I would not take them. Because Istanbul is the most diverse and social place to live in Turkey. (Miran)

There seems to be unanimity among my informants regarding the "similarity" between the Turkish and Syrian "people" as well as the "culture." Although they do not elaborate on what they mean by "culture," one may assume that it indicates a set of values, norms, and beliefs, and on a mundane level, certain daily practices. The food, music, religion, and even the language contribute to the sense of "similarity of culture." Ayhan Kaya (2017b) explains the very same phenomenon, which he calls a "comfort zone," or a "space of cultural affinity," by dwelling on the "historical, cultural, religious and societal links bridging Aleppo and Istanbul." (2017b:334) But then, why do not Syrians feel a part of the "Turkish community?"

3.5. Concluding remarks

Displaced Syrians and ordinary Turkish citizens, as well as other non-citizens, interact with each other prominently at the workplaces and neighborhoods. These encounters are significant as they do not contest but often reaffirm the social and symbolic boundaries between Syrians and non-Syrians. Nevertheless, my informants also offer a few cases where these boundaries are contested at the very basic level of establishing relations based on sympathy:

> My friend rented the house for us. It's the same house that my family are in until now. And a really cool family, they live upstairs, we're living in the ground floor. And they live up, over us… The husband is Kurdish-Turkish and the wife is Turkish […] They're super nice with us and always taking care of my family. (Wassim)

> In the first week, I went… He (the boss) was so polite, actually… He asked "How much do you want?" I told him "300 (Turkish lira per week)." Because if you tell them 300, they're gonna give you 200… For that reason I told more. So—and I saw people taking 300. And actually in one week we learned. And there were no ortacıs except us—me and my sister... So we are doing all the work… So I told him 300. He opened (the cash register), he gave me 300. I didn't believe it… Like, he didn't even argue! My sister said "Me too, 300." The girl, *ustabaşı* (forewoman), sitting there, she was Kurdish. He (the boss) looked at her (the forewoman), she was like this (*nodding*)… Yani, "they deserve it." So he gave my sister 300, too. We were so happy, actually… (*laughs*) (Ciwan)

Despite the feelings of similarity and familiarity with the people and culture, displaced Syrians are still *included yet excepted* (Khosravi 2010:111) in Turkey: Although formal and decent jobs are also available, Syrians constitute a significant portion of the (informal) labor market without being recognized as full-fledged members of the society. The encounters at workplaces and neighborhoods often seem to be exploitative if not antagonistic.

The social and symbolic boundaries attain an even more puzzling quality when it comes to the everyday practices of socialization. These boundaries are neither real nor static, yet they are strong constructs that shape the reality. The boundary-making in cases of socialization appears as a bilateral process, which is clearly observable in what Wassim describes as *an unwillingness to reach the other*.

> If I were someone who does not have friends and seeing *Turkish people not interested* in being friends with me, I would possibly think about it a lot. But *I don't feel emptiness* in my friendships… (Miran)

Indeed, my informants are highly sociable people. They do engage with a lot of people from different backgrounds and nationalities every day at the community center. Then, how is there *an unwillingness to reach the other*? The answer lies beyond unwillingness: They do not feel the absence of a community—if "the other" represents an exclusively Turkish community. The community center becomes a place where they preserve and reestablish their communities, their own "insider" spaces, in a wider context where they usually feel like "outsiders." I will explore this dynamic space in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

CIRCUMVENTION OF BOUNDARIES

> Social space 'incorporates' social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act […] From the point of view of knowing (*connaissance*), social space works (along with its concept) is a tool for the analysis of society. (Lefebvre 1991:33-34)

4.1. A brief (hi)story of the community center

Salem, the person who established the community center, is also the first person that I met on my first visit to the community center. Throughout my engagement with the community center as a student, as a volunteer-teacher, and as a researcher, he was one of the people with whom I spent a great deal of time. Yet, formally, I had the chance to listen to him twice, once during the interview for my research, and once during a question and answer session with a group of visitors to the community center.

The community center was initiated primarily for addressing the needs of children. Salem explains how they have initiated the center with a group of friends in order to be able to teach their kids:

> At that time, you know the kids, they had no chance to go to school, and some kids, they weren't able to see, like, people in their age since two years. And you know, every children has, like, really bad experience in the way how they left Syria, and in the way how they have been bombed, and the way how they, you know… But unfortunately there is no one to look or care about them. The families try but the family can do nothing… So anyway, we have a small meeting and we decide "Okay, we have to do something," you are an engineer, you are doctor, you are a teacher… Everyone has like a project, but all of them, they don't know exactly when they will be able to do what they are planning to do… They are looking to their kids and they have no chance to, you know, to do anything. So anyway, I said, "Okay, my home, I'm not in my home, I'm working all the time…" At that time I leave

> in the morning for work, I came in the evening, so I said to them "Take the house, use it during the day," it's like, you know, you can bring your kids, teach them, do what you want… (Salem)

Salem tells that soon they wanted to "do more than helping *only* their own children;" thus, they started to look for a bigger place. The community center first moved from his house to a bigger apartment. As the number of visitors, volunteers, and financial supporters increased, what has started as an initiative for children of displaced Syrians later became a meeting place both for children and for adults:

> So, and the place, we use it, you know, to do the activities during the day and we sleep there like 5-6 people, you know, young guys… So, okay, it continued like this for three months… We said, we can't continue like this, you know… But one day a friend of mine in Lebanon called, and they started to support us with a rent. So we start to arrange, we try to register ourselves as, like a *real organization*. We have difficulties, we don't know exactly the details, we want to do these… So, we knew that we need, like, certain amount, number of members, and this members have to have *ikamet*… But, you know, most of the guys, without *ikamet*… So, we need other people to register the association… (Salem)

Eventually, they arrange the necessary documents and register themselves as an official association in Turkey, offering many activities both for children and for adults, ranging from language classes to art workshops. As the activities are on a voluntary basis by nature, the center welcomes everyone who is willing to join and contribute in a way or another:

> At the beginning, we thought of supplies. Then we discovered that this is not our work, something we cannot do… We don't have the capacity and the money. So we concentrate on activities, education, art […] People start to come to support, to help us, you know, in our work, especially with the kids. And we start to do some theater, some people do mathematics, some people do blah blah, activities without organization… We weren't, yani, it's not our work, we are not professionals to do these… But everyday we learn new things about what we can do… (Salem)

As people gained experience in time, the activities took a more organized shape. Wassim, who is a part of the center from its early stages on, explains this change as follows:

> It changed according to people's needs in here that we are trying to support; it *evolved*… The *old version*, for example, if there are children and their

> families can't support them, they were bringing them to the center just for having fun, jumping… And it's not like classes, just, everybody trying to support each other, like, *khalas*… And the others were just coming there to sit, talk, and like, read, sleep, play music… You know, friends bring their friends… It was *like a home*, yani… (Wassim)

During the question and answer session, a visitor asks Salem whether they are in cooperation with other international organizations—as some other community centers do cooperate with international organizations and receive funds. He replies, "No:"

> We tried… We got funding from certain organization to do activities with the kids. We don't know to apply for funding. We are not, yani… We had experience with, like, big organization to fund our activities. Actually we weren't satisfied—maybe it's our mistake, not their mistake, but in general we don't feel comfortable with this kind of big donors. Because, yani, you know, they need us to sign papers, *we spend our day signing papers and taking pictures*… And the students say, "Why do you take pictures?" Because we want to take money from… Yeah, it's bad, actually, we had very very bad experience… We don't do it anymore… (Salem)

Wassim similarly explains that how big NGOs and corporations conduct project-based works, where one has to follow certain plans, procedures, and timeline. However, this community center aims at offering a free space, where people may hold whatever activity they want without following certain procedures.

> When I went one day to ask about funding, they said, "You know why we give you the money? Because we learn that you are the only organization that has Syrian-Alawite family." I said, "I have no idea… There is Alawite family?" I don't ask people if you are Alawite, or Christian, or, you know… I have people who need help, and some kids to play, that's it… I don't want to know… Maybe it is important, but if this is the only reason you help me, no… I said, "Keep your money…" (Salem)

Salem's life has been shaped by migration and displacement long before the revolution in Syria started in 2011. He, thus, is a well-connected person, knowing people both from Syria and from other countries, which made initiating such an organization possible when he came to Istanbul:

> Yani, the idea (of the community center) came… After we came here, you know, I have a lot of friend, we found each other, you know, because actually the Syrian, suddenly everyone decided to go in different direction. But

> when I came here, I knew that I have friend here, I have friend here, I have some people… (Salem)

Both Syrians and non-Syrians seem to learn about the community center mainly through pre-existing connections, the range of which may vary from family members and relatives to friends. In this sense, the community center's connections grow in a snowballing fashion:

> People know this place through the families… The people, they know there are English classes here, so they send their kids. (Salem)

> Nasser and Aiman, they were the first ones I know from the center… I met them in Gaziantep, later they moved in Istanbul. And they introduced me to Salem, and then I know everybody… (Wassim)

> I knew the community center from the beginning… Ali's father was my friend, he told me about the first event. It was like music, poetry… (Hasna)

> I didn't know about this place […] I found a job at an NGO. I met the person for signing the contract, we needed to print some pages… So, we were nearby, he took me here (to the community center), just for printing and signing the contract… I entered, I saw Nasser… Coincidence! Yani, I didn't see him for many years, I knew him from Damascus… Then I started to come here. I started to join English classes… (Yousef)

> When I started working in that place, I met Farhad, Amir, and Ali. Me and Farhad became friends after few days. He invited me to the center. That's how I started to come… (Ciwan)

The community center schedules weekly activities and classes both for children and for adults such as language classes, art workshops, movie nights, and music events. All of my informants were/are involved in the community center's activities as well as chores, which substantially shapes the spatial and social dimensions of their daily routine. The following sections demonstrate how this community center attains instrumental, socio-psychological, and cultural roles in overcoming the social and symbolic boundaries that displaced Syrians face in Istanbul.

4.2. Circumventing boundaries: the instrumental role of the community center

> You meet new people here, *foreigners*… You learn new skills […] You need to touch people's needs. (Yousef)

> […] Later, Farhad told me about the scholarship […] I quit the job to be a full-time student again. (Ciwan)

Both Farhad and Ciwan had to leave Syria before completing their university studies; both of them had to work during their stay in Turkey. Still, on a shiny summer day, they departed to Canada for continuing their education. Nearly after four years of stay in Turkey, this journey became possible mainly through the community center: Volunteer-teachers and other contacts at the center supported Farhad and Ciwan to prepare for language proficiency exams, apply for undergraduate programs, and receive scholarships.

With the classes and other activities it offers, the community center aims at giving people the necessary tools to construct their new lives in the best possible way[47] in Turkey and beyond. This often requires a great deal of cooperation among and between Syrians and non-Syrians. The purpose-oriented nature of the community center does not only help in maintaining pre-existing networks, it further ignites the involvement of a heterogeneous group of people in terms of nationality and age, which paves the way for new connections. Both the skills acquired/improved and the networks become instrumental in finding professional and intellectual opportunities.

Both children and adults join in various classes in the community center, yet the language classes are the most popular ones. Although in some cases communication may be held through another common language such as English or Kurdish, learning the Turkish language becomes almost a must to maintain the basic everyday communication for displaced Syrians in Turkey. In addition to Turkish language classes, there is a high demand for English, and occasionally for French and German languages –despite not being vital for living in Turkey. One might claim that the people who join in these classes try to improve their skills not only for the immediate future but also for the

[47] Here I do not necessarily mean a life with more capital, be it economic, social, or cultural; it may also mean a life with the feeling of fulfillment.

distant future; and the community center plays an intermediary role in acquiring these skills by offering free classes.

The community center does not only provide a space for learning. Likewise, it provides a space for people who wish to contribute in one way or another for a particular purpose. Just as when the center was first initiated, many people, Syrian or non-Syrian, wish to do something to help in facilitating the lives of Syrians in Turkey, but they often do not know what exactly to do, or where to start. Volunteering, in which I also take part by teaching Turkish, is a way of facilitating and enhancing Syrians' everyday lives. There are many ways of volunteering. Some volunteers take the children out for playing football, some teach how to play an instrument, some teach language. Teaching language skills is instrumental in overcoming the language barrier. Both adults and children need to have some Turkish language skills in the immediate future, at work, at school, or in the street. These involvements form the everyday lives of both volunteer-teachers and the student-participants. While some people do not volunteer, they alternatively donate to the community center in order to support the activities, as a sign of being in solidarity. These donations are crucial in carrying out many activities. On a very simple level, paying the place's rent, buying boardmarkers, papers, etc. are all carried out via donations.

Apart from classes and other kinds of activities held at the community center, the involvement of both Syrians and non-Syrians from various ages and backgrounds is helpful for establishing new connections. These connections may be useful in dealing with daily minor problems, such as opening a bank account, or reading a medicine's instructions for use. The connections also facilitate further encounters, and occasionally become instrumental in finding an employment or study opportunity. In addition to employment and education, women use these connections to sell the goods they produce, and thus contribute to their household income. The purpose-oriented nature of the community center thus becomes crucial in improving the social and spatial mobility of participants—in Istanbul, between cities, or between countries. Hence, the purpose-oriented nature of the community center contributes to the lives of displaced Syrians from various ages and backgrounds. The practical role of the community center, such as overcoming the language barriers, finding a better job, a scholarship opportunity, renders the boundaries more permeable (Lamont and Molnár 2002:173).

4.3. Circumventing boundaries: the socio-psychological role of the community center

The purpose-oriented nature of the community center plays a practical role in everyday lives of displaced Syrians, which is a substantial part of how they may overcome the existing boundaries described in the previous chapters. By providing a space for preserving and establishing networks among and between Syrians and non-Syrians, the community center facilitates cooperation and contributes to the social and spatial mobility of displaced Syrians. Nonetheless, these networks should not be seen solely as practical or professional partnerships. In most cases, these connections evolve into friendships; hence, they obtain social and psychological importance on top of a practical one.

> I *love* the concept. For me, it's a very good thing, people have this *sanctuary*, you know... *It's a house, not an institute*. (Wassim)
>
> *I feel more comfortable here than home…* (Yousef)

Wassim's choice of word is very striking: Rather than being an "institute," implying the classes and other activities which have more practical meanings, he prefers to highlight how this community center is a "house," where one feels "comfortable" and belong. One could take refuge in this "sanctuary," no matter how one feels. This role of the community center, again, rearranges the quotidian lives of not only Syrians but also non-Syrians who are parts of it.

When I ask how he started to visit the community center, Miran replies, "I heard about the acting workshop, then I started to come." Later, the center's role in his social life overweighs Miran's initial practical motivation. He currently spends most of his time at the community center. He comes to the center almost daily even though he does not have any classes to follow on that particular day. He shares the daily chores with other people at the community center. When I ask about the community center's place in his life, he replies: "Now, it's pretty much the most of my life… I even moved near the community center, in order to be close…" Similar to Miran, many of my interlocutors

find it practical to live close to the community center, as it is the place where they spend most of their times.

> I don't feel like I am going to work. No… I feel like I'm going to a place, there are friends, happy things to do… I come home just for sleeping, take a shower, that's it… (Hasna)

Although carrying out the activities at the community center requires a considerable amount of time, my informants make it clear that the daily responsibilities are not the sole reason for their presence at the center. "The atmosphere," says Siyamend, is the reason why he loves being a part of the community center. It is a place where one can find and give social and emotional support:

> Being here, helping all these people… Not necessarily by money, or foods, or clothes; sometimes *to give love or nice words, it helps a lot*... (Hasna)

Despite attaining a more practical function in time, the community center does not seem to have lost much from its *home-ness* as Wassim suggests. Just as in the "old-version," people are still visiting the center "just to sit, talk, sleep, and play music," which indeed eases the feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many people who follow the classes also join other activities and events that have more socio-cultural than practical aspects. As some people may only volunteer, teach, or join the classes, others may only prefer joining other types of activities, where one can enjoy a movie or listens to some music and socialize with the people around. Although the community center serves as a platform to initiate encounters between people of different nationalities, ages, and backgrounds, these acquaintances do not stay bounded with the community center. People carry those friendships to other places, cities, and even countries as they move.

The social and symbolic boundaries that were outlined in the previous chapters are still assertively present; nevertheless, the community center's role as a platform for socialization seems to alleviate the otherwise acute effects of these boundaries in displaced Syrians' lives. Yet, just as Wassim did not feel the need to learn Turkish because of his involvement of a Syrian-international community in Gaziantep, this community center also engenders *an unwillingness to reach the other* outside—exactly by facilitating reaching people from inside. Serving *as a house rather than an institute*, the community

center becomes a microcosm that facilitates building a close-tied community for the participants, which renders the boundaries outside *relatively unimportant* (Lamont and Molnár 2002:173).

4.4. Circumventing boundaries: the cultural role of the community center

> Musical rhythm does not only sublimate the aesthetic and a rule of art: it has an *ethical* function. In its relation to the body, to time, to the work, it illustrates *real* (everyday) life. It *purifies* it in the acceptance of *catharsis*. Finally, and above all, it brings compensation for the miseries of everydayness, for its deficiencies and failures. Music integrates the functions, the *values* of Rhythm… (Lefebvre 2004:66)

I enter the community center. There is a music event that evening. People slowly start coming, as the musicians finish their rehearsal. A few of us start arranging the chairs and the lights before the concert begins. People take their seats, and the musicians start playing. The room is packed; all seats are taken, so the rest listens to the music while standing. I am among the ones standing in the kitchen. At some point, Majid and I turn to each other and nod, "*There are so many unfamiliar faces*."

The center rarely gets that crowded. Apparently, this has something to do with the activity itself: Listening to music. Music seems to gather more people than any other activity or class. The melodies are from across the Middle East, Anatolia, and the Balkans, which would not come up on a regular radio channel anymore. The instruments vary from occidental violin to oriental oud and qanun. At some point, the band starts to play a song, the lyrics of which exist in different variations in Turkish, Arabic, and Greek languages. Some from the audience start singing the song in Arabic, then they switch to the Turkish lyrics on the second verse, and the Greek audience takes over on the third verse. I look at the faces in the room: Some take videos while some others just listen to the music with a smile on their faces. I realize how music becomes a powerful substance to blur the boundaries between Istanbul, Damascus, and Athens.

Lisa Malkki criticizes the sedentarist assumptions that bounds culture to specific territories, which become especially problematic in migration research, as it reinforces the perception of displacement as a loss of identity and culture (1992:34, 1995:508). This community center appears as an epitome of how people 'carry' the embodied

knowledge, ideas, and cultural elements across the boundaries. In addition to music, other cultural elements, such as food, literature, and other forms of art, are kept alive through the daily practices and activities at the community center. Yet, this preservation of cultural elements simultaneously includes interaction—if not transformation. One can often witness scenes of Syrians and non-Syrians suggesting books or songs to each other, the women coming together in order to cook Syrian[48] food, or Turkish volunteers conducting an *Ebru* (paper marbling) workshop at the community center. By preserving and establishing connections, it appears as a dynamic space where the Syrian culture—if it is possible to speak about a unique culture—is both preserved and changed. The community center, thus, contains the continuation of a particular lifestyle without denying the radical changes to it.

4.5. Concluding remarks: uncontested boundaries?

Syrians have different ways of recreating new "insider" spaces, and establishing a community center is only one of them. The community center, particularly aiming at alleviating the difficulties that Syrians face in Turkey, opens up a multicultural and multilingual space where people from various nationalities and backgrounds may establish friendships and other professional or intellectual networks. This situation ultimately improves Syrians' mobility and helps them in surpassing the social and symbolic boundaries. While it contests the social and symbolic boundaries by facilitating socialization, another boundary—that Wassim describes as *an unwillingness to reach the other*—appears around the community center.

Although the social and symbolic boundaries might become *permeable* or *relatively unimportant* (Lamont and Molnár 2002:173) owing to the existence of the community center and to the roles it deploys; there seems to be a lack of collective contestation of the legal boundaries among Syrians. While the community center becomes a primary actor in contesting the social and symbolic boundaries that pose problems in displaced Syrians' everyday lives by occupying instrumental, socio-psychological, and cultural roles; it conversely leaves the legal boundaries mainly uncontested. For instance, it does not organize a protest in order to condemn the xenophobia against Syrians, or to de-

[48] Though it would not be accurate to single out an exclusively Syrian food, or culture in general, there may be particularly Syrian components to cultural elements that are dispersed across a wide geography.

mand substantive rights. Despite that some of my informants are politically active, they do not seem to engage in a collective political struggle, especially not under the banner of the community center. Does this indicate the *impermeability* (Lamont and Molnár 2002:173) of the legal boundaries? Is it a readily-surrender?

As stated above, the community center is registered as an official association in Turkey. The Turkish state, thus, has the authority to control the activities of the community center, and even abolish it altogether. Moreover, the Turkish state might identify and deport, or at least refuse to renew the residence permit of the foreigners associated with the community center. The temporary protection status itself is already fragile, and the hostility towards Syrians might easily be used as an excuse to change the collective legal status of temporarily protected Syrians in Turkey. In this scheme, little room is left for collective maneuver. The legal boundaries stay uncontested not necessarily because of their impermeable nature; they might be—and actually are—circumvented individually in multiple ways. However, collective action becomes "dangerous" through various state mechanisms. In this case, avoiding the potential hazards by not taking collective action may as well be understood as a strategy that enables Syrians to circumvent the boundaries in more subtle ways.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> Culture, race, class, gender are all appropriated as camouflage in the reproduction of borders creatively and resourcefully in unexpected places and surprising forms. Cultural fences, class walls, and gender ditches emerge as new and powerful borders even as they never announce themselves as borders. (Soğuk 2007:284-285)

Border enforcements (De Genova 2015a) are indeed severely present in the city of Istanbul. The quotidian practices of the state as well as the ordinary people constantly remake the boundaries by creating "social division." (Nail 2016:2) This research manifests how the dynamic relationship between displaced Syrians and Turkish citizens, as well as the Turkish state, produces different forms of boundaries. While describing the current legal structure as boundaries imposed by the Turkish state, I employ the term *legal boundaries*. Furthermore, I adopt Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár's definitions of *symbolic* and *social boundaries* in order to capture the complex boundary-making practices between and among Syrians and Turkish citizens that engender feelings of difference, similarity, and group membership (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168-169). My fieldwork suggests that the legal, symbolic, and social boundaries are not stable in terms of temporality and spatial location, which may occasionally constitute challenges in the everyday lives of my informants. The temporary protection status, for instance, is the epitome of the instability. Additionally, boundaries do not have to be imposed by one side on the other; they may as well be bilaterally constructed, though sometimes driven by distinct motivations. The research further illuminates the ways in which legal, symbolic, and social boundaries are (un)contested and (re)constructed at a local community center initiated by displaced Syrians in Istanbul, through the instrumental, socio-psychological, and cultural roles it attains. Ultimately, some boundaries remain collectively uncontested despite that contesting boundaries becomes inherent in the everyday

practices of my informants. The processes of contesting boundaries inevitably entail the processes of making new boundaries, often at the periphery of the community center.

5.1. Limitations and further directions

> Visitor: Do you think that there are Syrians in the city or in the area that are still, sort of, looking for people, and, feeling isolated, or…?
> Salem: I think yes. There are a lot of people. It's not all the people able to, or succeed to integrate with the… They are not able to deal with the new situation. This is, like, *extreme… Something extreme happened in your life…* One day, you are out of your city, out of your home. You spend all your savings…. You don't know the language of the country where you are. And you didn't choose the neighborhood you are going to live. Because, you know, you have limited capacity to pay the rent—if you can pay the rent…

In a city with more than half a million displaced Syrians, I get to know only a handful of them. This is the nature of ethnographic research: It is not exhaustive. As an anthropologist, I do not have the authority to make claims for all displaced Syrians in Istanbul. In a sense, my interlocutors may be relatively unique to have this community as a major part of their everyday lives—compared to other people who might still feel "isolated"; nevertheless, I believe that the experiences of my interlocutors moderately—if not entirely—provide an insight into the experiences of other Syrians. Similarly, this community center is only one of the many in Istanbul, and it would not be accurate to claim that—albeit having similar characteristics—all the community centers have the same dynamics.

Although this research primarily focuses on the collective forms of challenging the legal, symbolic, and social boundaries, it also hints at other ways of challenging them individually. Especially with the legal boundaries, circumventing them becomes much more feasible on an individual level, rather than taking collective action and "drawing attention" that might jeopardize the collective status of displaced Syrians in Turkey.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson assert, "Remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people." (1992:11) Similarly, Dawn Chatty describes the "home/land" as a *powerful unifying symbol* (2014:81), referring to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). Having a common homeland

might undoubtedly connect people, especially in a context where the return is not possible; and "home/land" may eventually become a construct, a nostalgia in people's minds. Nevertheless, one should not trivialize the narratives of "beautiful," "harmonic" homeland as mere constructs, especially in the aftermath of the total destruction of a country. Syrians are not stuck in a remembered past; they are highly aware of the realities of the present. Despite establishing new lives in Turkey and beyond, they always have one eye back in Syria. This often has to do with relatives and friends who are still there, sometimes even more than their attachment to Syria as their "home/land." Hence, at the intersection between *experience, memory,* and *narration* (Rosenthal 2006), the (re)formation of self and subjectivity calls for further research.

Conducting research by focusing on specific ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups might further contribute to the academic literature on borders and boundaries. For instance, due to my unfamiliarity with the Kurdish language, specifically Kurmancî, I was unable to observe the interaction between Kurdish-Syrian and Kurdish-Turkish people.[49] I believe that the use of the Kurdish language both by Turkish and Syrian citizens of Kurdish origin is such an intriguing case, which needs further analysis. Similarly, a gendered lens on the same topic (see Freedman et al. 2017; Kıvılcım 2016; Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kıvılcım 2015) might initiate further discussion.

[49] See Kılıçaslan 2016, a research conducted with the Syrian and Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin.

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